
مجموعة الرقابة الفلسطينية



PALESTINIAN MONITORING GROUP

SPECIAL REPORT

New Procedures for Obtaining Israeli-Issued Magnetic Identity Cards

In 4 West Bank districts, Palestinian civilians are now subject to new procedures in order to obtain an Israeli-issued magnetic identity card. *This new system requires that Palestinian civilians have their hands electronically scanned when applying for the card.* Hands scans are also required from Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip.

These procedures have emerged in the context of Israel's plans for a "new security system" for the Occupied Palestinian Territory.¹ Among the stated features of this system is that the "use of sophisticated technology will reduce the inconvenience caused by long security checks"; Palestinian civilians "will get 'smart cards', which will enable them to cross without any physical security check".²

At present, the use of advanced technology at Israeli checkpoints, Wall gates, and crossing points is not widespread. However, *the new procedures to which Palestinian civilians are subject indicate that Israel is in the process of gathering data that will enable further and more extensive use of such technology.* In addition to the areas where new regulations are now being implemented, preparations are underway in another West Bank district for applying the new procedures.

Israel claims that such technology will facilitate and improve Palestinian movement. However, Palestinian civilians who have been fingerprinted, or must now have their fingerprints scanned in order to pass from one area to the next, consistently report that the procedures are humiliating and collectively treat the entire population like criminals.

¹ *Israeli Assistance Steps and Humanitarian Measures Towards the Palestinians*, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Division for the United Nations and International Organizations, May 2005, p. 4.

² *ibid.*

Applying for and Renewal of Magnetic Identity Cards

Possession of a magnetic ID card is, in most cases, a pre-requisite for Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip identity card holders to receive a permit from the Israeli authorities to enter Occupied East Jerusalem or Israel.

In 4 West Bank districts – Ramallah, Jenin, Tulkarem and Nablus – Palestinian civilians must now submit to a full scan of the right hand and separate scans of the right and left index finger in order to obtain the card. On 25 September, the Israeli District Civil Liaison (DCL) office in Hebron closed for 4 months in order to prepare the office for implementing the new system in the Hebron District. Hand scans have also been required from Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip in order to obtain a magnetic card.

In areas where the new procedures have been implemented, the costs associated with applying for, or renewing, the magnetic card have increased, as has the period of their validity. In these districts, issued magnetic cards are valid for a 2 year period, while in other districts, cards are valid for only 1 year. The new cards are renewable for an additional 2 years.

Procedures for obtaining magnetic cards vary slightly from district to district. In the West Bank, most Palestinian civilians must submit the application in person at the relevant Israeli DCL (*see “Ramallah and El Bireh District” below for an example of new procedures implemented in the West Bank*).

In the Gaza Strip, during the period of Israel’s withdrawal, to date, no magnetic cards have been issued or renewed for Gaza residents. Prior to this suspension, as a general rule, only males aged 30 years and over, who are married with children were eligible to receive a magnetic card. Those interested in doing so registered their name and identity card number with an office of the Palestinian National Security Forces (NSF) in Jabalya refugee camp. Palestinian civilians approved by Israel to apply for the card then completed the application process at the Israeli Civil Administration office in Erez Industrial Zone (*see “Gaza Districts” below for more details on procedures implemented in the Gaza Strip*).³

Many Palestinian civilians’ application for a magnetic ID card is refused for purported security reasons. In all districts the applicant is informed immediately of refusal. If approved, in 7 West Bank districts and in the Gaza Strip applicants receive their card the same day. In at least 2 West Bank districts, applicants must return to pick up their card at a later date.

Ramallah and El Bireh District

In the District of Ramallah and El Bireh, magnetic cards are issued or renewed through the Israeli DCL at Beit El. Palestinian civilians must pay NIS 100, which includes a fee of NIS 85 – made through the purchase of Israeli “stamps” that are attached to the application – and a NIS 15 fee to an office that types the application form for applicants.

³ See Annex for an overview of procedures implemented in all West Bank and Gaza districts.

The office responsible for issuing and renewing magnetic cards at Beit El was closed for several months from the fall of 2004 through the winter of 2005. Consequently, there is a considerable backlog of applicants at present. The Israeli DCL has allocated certain days of the week for specific cities, towns and villages. For example, Palestinian residents of the cities of Ramallah and El Bireh, along with a number of other area locales, are only able to apply for, or renew, their magnetic cards on Monday.

Soldiers staffing the DCL office issue Palestinian applicants a number indicating their place in line. However, many applicants report that this system is not enforced. Consequently, the only way of ensuring that one will have the opportunity to complete the process is to arrive at Beit El early on the day in question. Given the surplus of Palestinian civilians attempting to renew their magnetic cards at present, applicants report that wait times are long and many are forced to make more than one trip to Beit El.

Once a Palestinian civilian's number is "called", the applicant proceeds to 1 of 4 booths where Israeli soldiers process the application. If an applicant is rejected, he/she is informed immediately. If approved, Israeli soldiers take a photo of the applicant, and scan the applicant's right hand and right and left index fingers. Many applicants report that their hand was scanned 4 or 5 times before the soldiers were satisfied that the scanned image was sufficiently clear. Approved applicants receive their new card on site.

Palestinian civilians report that the process is degrading and that communication with the Israeli soldiers is difficult, given their location behind thick glass panels. All communication occurs over loudspeakers, making the soldiers' orders difficult to understand and allowing everyone else present in the waiting room to hear the communication.

Gaza Districts

During the period of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, to date, no magnetic cards have been issued or renewed for Gaza residents. Immediately prior to this suspension, as a general rule, only males aged 30 and over, married and with children were eligible to receive a magnetic identity card in the Gaza Strip. Women were ineligible, unless they work for an international organisation. Procedures for obtaining magnetic cards for Palestinian civilians working for international organisations vary from those outlined below, which deal with Palestinian civilians applying independently.

In order to begin the application process, Palestinian civilians needed to register their name and identity card number at the office of the Palestinian National Security Forces (NSF) in Jabalya refugee camp. The Palestinian NSF played no role in processing the applications. Rather, they submitted the names of those who wished to apply to the Israeli authorities, who subsequently returned a list of those who had been approved to apply and set a date and time at which that group of applicants was allowed to complete the application process. The Israeli authorities limited the number of Palestinian applicants who were allowed to apply at one time.

Palestinian civilians approved to apply met on the day of the appointment in Jabalya refugee camp, where they boarded a bus that transported them to the gate of Erez Industrial Zone. One applicant at a time underwent a security check at the gate before proceeding onto another bus that transported them to the Israeli office responsible for issuing the magnetic card.

At this office, Israeli soldiers photographed the applicant and scanned their right hand and right index finger.⁴ If a Palestinian civilian was rejected, he was informed on site. Not all Palestinian civilians who had been “approved” to apply received the card. Once reaching the Israeli office, some were taken for questioning by Israeli intelligence officers. If approved, the applicant received the card the same day.

On average, Palestinian civilians, who were approved to apply, spent one day traveling to Erez, completing the procedures, and returning, regardless of whether they were issued a magnetic card or not.

Use of New Technology

Gaza Strip: Erez Crossing Point

Palestinian civilians who have work permits to enter Israel through Erez swipe their card through a machine that is located outside a glass-enclosed booth staffed by an Israeli soldier. This prompts the civilian’s “file” to emerge, which confirms that the worker has been issued a permit to enter Israel. No hand or fingerprint scans are required at the crossing.

West Bank: Ras ‘Atiya Wall Gate

New technology is currently being utilized at the Ras ‘Atiya Wall gate in the Qalqiliya District. These new procedures began following the Israeli army’s installation in early July 2005 of new equipment at the gate.

Some 1,100 Palestinian civilians from the Palestinian communities of Ad Dab’a, Ras Tira, Wadi ar Rasha, ‘Arab Abu Farda and ‘Arab ar Ramadin al Janubi utilize the Ras ‘Atiya Wall gate, which is open daily from 06:00 – 18:00. All Palestinian civilians aged 12 years and above residing in these communities possess Israeli-issued permits allowing access through the gate.⁵ They must apply for permits to cross the gate on behalf of their relatives from other areas who wish to visit them.

All persons passing through the gate 12 years and over are required to place their index finger into a scanning machine each time they pass through the Wall gate. During the first or second time passing through the gate, an Israeli soldier attaches an adhesive image of the Palestinian

⁴ Some applicants report that their left index finger was also scanned.

⁵ The Israeli army does not allow the entry of goods through this Wall gate, nor are taxis or trucks allowed passage. Children under 12 years old are not required to possess permits. They must carry an original copy of their birth certificate, along with a copy of their father’s identity card. In order to pass, their father must be present with them, though in some cases, the presence of another family member, such as an uncle, may be sufficient. This, however, is at the discretion of the Israeli soldier present.

civilians' scanned fingerprint to their ID card. This image is then compared to that generated by the scan taken when passing through the gate, as a means of verifying the identity of the person wishing to pass. Palestinian civilians who regularly pass through the gate report that Israeli soldiers photograph each person who crosses the gate around once a week.

The fingerprint scanner, in addition to other equipment, is transported on a vehicle which arrives at the Wall gate Sundays through Thursdays and remains there from 06:00 to 18:00. On Fridays and Saturdays, the Israeli army does not utilize the fingerprint scanner, but civilians are still required to show permits in order to cross.

Civilians forced to use the Wall gate report that the new procedures are humiliating and make them feel like criminals in a police station. A number of civilians, including the Head of Ad Dab'a Village Council and his family members, refuse to use the fingerprint device. Because of this refusal, they are forced to enter the area through a different checkpoint, significantly lengthening travel times and expense.

ANNEX: Procedures for Obtaining Magnetic Cards in West Bank and Gaza Districts, September 2005

DISTRICT	COST OF "STAMPS"	PERIOD OF VALIDITY	HAND SCANS REQUIRED	PHOTOS	ISSUED ON SITE	REJECTED ON SITE
WEST BANK						
Jerusalem	NIS 40	1 year	NO	Submitted by applicant	YES	YES
Ramallah	NIS 85	2 years	YES	Digital photo taken at Israeli DCL	YES	YES
Jenin	NIS 75	2 years	YES	Digital photo	YES	YES
Tulkarem	NIS 85	2 years	YES	Digital photo	YES	YES
Qalqiliya	NIS 38-40	1 year	NO	Submitted	NO	YES
Nablus	NIS 100 (inc. fee for filling out application)	2 years	YES	Digital photo	YES	YES
Salfit	NIS 38-40	1 year	NO	Submitted	NO	YES
Jericho	NIS 40	1 year	NO	Submitted	YES	YES
Bethlehem	NIS 38	1 year	NO	Submitted	YES	YES
Hebron ⁶	NIS 30	1 year	NO	Submitted	VARIABLES	YES
GAZA STRIP						
All Districts	VARIABLES	2 years	YES	Digital photo	YES	YES

⁶ The Israeli DCL for the Hebron District closed on 25 September to prepare itself to implement the new procedures. The information featured in this table deals with procedures implemented prior to that closure.