



WEST BANK Closure count and analysis

occupied Palestinian territory

September 2006

This report provides an update on the number of obstacles that form part of the Government of Israel's system of internal closures within the West Bank.

The closure system is a primary cause of the humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It restricts Palestinian access not only to basic services such as health and education, but divides communities from their land and one another, places of work and sites of religious worship. The types of obstacles used to restrict free Palestinian movement include permanent and partially manned checkpoints, roadblocks (consisting of rows of 1-metre concrete blocks), metal gates, earth mounds, earth walls (a long series of earth mounds), trenches, road barriers and an elaborate system of permits. The purpose of these obstacles, as the Israeli Government states, is to protect Israeli citizens from Palestinian militant attacks that have killed around 1,000 Israelis since September 2000.

OCHA field staff collates information about the exact location of each closure with a Global Positioning System (GPS). The information is then integrated into a Geographic Information System (GIS) and used to 'map' each obstacle.

Main Findings:

No significant improvement in Palestinian movement has been observed. Closures continue to carve up the West Bank, leading to the isolation of communities, in particular the cities of Nablus, Jerusalem as well as the Jordan Valley.

The fragmentation of the West Bank has been reinforced during the last three months.

The most evident trends including the following:

- The movement of northern governorates and Nablus residents to the rest of the West Bank continues to be restricted heavily;
- Palestinian vehicle traffic have been further excluded from main road arteries used by Israeli traffic by more strategic road blocks and checkpoints leading on to these routes.
- The Jordan Valley has been further isolated with the latest closure and security policies of the IDF;
- Barrier construction increases the amount of agricultural land left in "closed areas" between the Barrier and the Green Line.

As of 20 September 2006, the West Bank closure system comprises **528** checkpoints and physical obstacles placed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on roads to control and restrict Palestinian movement – representing an increase of almost 2% on the 518 obstacles reported in the June 2006 update. This latest count represents an 11% increase in the number of physical obstacles erected by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) since the beginning of 2006 and almost 40% since August 2005.¹

Table 1: Palestinian movement within the West Bank – physical obstacles

	No. of physical obstacles		
	Total	Manned	Unmanned
Jan 06	475	59	416
Feb 06	487	60	427
Mar 06	505	63	442
Apr 06	504	66	438
May 06	519	71	448
Jun 06	526	76	450
Jul 06	540	77	463
Aug 06	547	79	468
Sep 06	528	83	445

Source: OCHA field observation - 2006



Northern West Bank

In the northern part of the West Bank² the number of closures has declined in absolute terms from 188 to 174. This reflects a decrease in the number of earthmounds in the governorates of Nablus (by 38%), Tulkarm (by 50%) and in Jenin (by almost 50%). However, the number of road gates, road barriers and trenches has increased especially along roads used by Israeli settlers. In many instances, road gates have replaced earthmounds and have been flanked by trenches tightening IDF control over roads used exclusively by Israeli settlers (e.g. Road 585). One new permanent checkpoint has been established at Mevo Dotan (Jenin), in addition to a new partial checkpoint near 'Aqarab, Road 505. The tight closure around Nablus remains unchanged.

Table 2: Closure comparison of northern West Bank Q2 – Q3

	No. of physical obstacles		
	June 2006	September 2006	Difference
Checkpoint	23	24	+1
Partial Checkpoint	1	2	+1
Road Gate	24	35	+11
Road Block	15	13	-2
Earth mound	100	61	-39
Earth Wall	7	14	+7
Trench	8	11	+3
Road Barrier	10	14	+4
Total	188	174	-14

Source: OCHA field observations - 2006

Central West Bank

In the central part of the West Bank, the IDF has upgraded the checkpoint of Atara making it permanent and thus significantly impacting on Palestinian movement already recorded in the north. Ongoing construction of the Barrier continues to make some closures redundant on the western and southern side of the governorate of Ramallah. Two new gates have been installed on exit roads from Palestinian communities onto Road 60.

Passage into **Jerusalem** remains highly restricted with entry points for West Bank Palestinians reduced to four, controlled by the Border Police. Almost all other areas of the Palestinian urban area of Jerusalem are now closed off by the Barrier.

There is no significant change in the number of closures reported in the Jordan Valley (JV). However, access has been further tightened by the enforcement of a highly restrictive permit regime at IDF checkpoints placed at entry points.

Southern West Bank

In the southern West Bank,³ overall numbers of obstacles have increased to 240 from 209 (June 2006). This largely reflects the impact of the new road barrier in the south of Hebron (along Road 317) on the routes used by local herding communities to reach range-land, rain cisterns and cultivated land on both sides of the road. Additional closures have been placed on Road 60 to prevent Palestinians from using the most direct route connecting their communities (Hebron) and to prevent access to the Palestinian agricultural land adjacent to it (Bethlehem).

Table 3: Closure comparison of Hebron Governorate Q2 – Q3 (excluding Hebron Old City)

	No. of physical obstacles		
	June 2006	September 2006	Difference
Checkpoint	15	15	0
Partial Checkpoint	3	5	+2
Road Gate	23	23	0
Road Block	10	16	+6
Earth mound	114	105	-9
Earth Wall	5	4	-1
Trench	0	0	0
Road Fence	4	33	+29
Total	174	201	+27

Source: OCHA field observations - 2006

DEVELOPMENTS IN DETAIL

1. Movement of northern governorates and Nablus residents to the rest of the West Bank continues to be restricted heavily:

- On 19 July, the IDF imposed **restrictions** on the movement of Palestinian males between the ages of 16 – 35 from traveling beyond the checkpoints of **Anabta, Kafriat, Kafriat Tunnel (Tulkarm) and Za'atara (Nablus)**, unless in possession of a permit. On 23 August, the restriction was applied only to Palestinian males between 16 to 30 years old. Currently the restriction is not being enforced consistently but applied erratically at each individual checkpoint by the IDF sector commanders.

- This creates enormous uncertainty for access to work, education and all other aspects of life, and places an increased burden on the already fragile economy in the north of the West Bank.

- Six manned checkpoints and two roadblocks surround the city of Nablus**, its refugee camps and villages around it affecting almost 216,000 Palestinians.



- Age restrictions continue to be imposed on males between the ages of 16 and 35, confining around 37,000 men to within the city limits.
 - No direct connection exists between Nablus and Tubas, Jenin or the Jordan Valley following **the complete closure of the Al Badhan road during the summer**. Initially restricted at the beginning of April 2006 by earthmounds, passage on foot is no longer allowed by the IDF forcing all movement on a long detour towards the north and west of the West Bank.
 - Nearly 550 students from Tubas attending Al Najah University in Nablus have to take a detour via Anabta (Tulkarm) and Beit Iba checkpoints to reach their place of study.
 - As of May, **Atara checkpoint (Ramallah) has become permanent**. This route is the only one for Palestinians coming from the north and wishing to reach Ramallah; the activation of the checkpoint on a permanent basis effectively creates another bottleneck for Palestinians from the northern West Bank wishing to travel south.
 - About 2,317 students from Bir Zeit University pass through this checkpoint either daily or on a weekly basis.
- ## 2. The separation of Israeli and Palestinian traffic is entrenched with more strategic closures:
- In Jenin, the trench north of Road 585 has been upgraded to channel the movement of Palestinian traffic towards flying checkpoints. In Nablus, a new gate on Road 60 and a fence at Qusin will effectively **channel all Palestinian movement through the Jit checkpoint**.
 - A structural upgrade of the **checkpoint of Anabta** has been undertaken by the IDF in recent months to improve the only existing connection for Palestinians between Tulkarm/Jenin and the Nablus area and **shift permanently the route of Palestinian movement in the north away from Road 60 to the west**;
 - In Tulkarm, two road barriers have been erected on **Road 557** near Kafriat checkpoint to separate the movement of Palestinians from that of Israeli settlers. A similar measure has been put in place on Road 446 in Salfit governorate;
 - **Gates** have been placed by the IDF on secondary roads linking to **Road 505** (east of Za'atara checkpoint, south of Nablus) and **Road 585** in Jenin. They replace earthmounds and are linked by other obstacles such as trenches to ensure Palestinians are unable to bypass the closures. This new measure would lead to less movement restrictions if opened but to date none have been made accessible to Palestinian traffic;
 - The lack of access onto **Road 505** continues to make the **territorial viability of the Governorate of Salfit impossible, effectively** cutting it in half with the northern section dependent on Nablus and Qalqiliya, and the southern half reliant on Ramallah.
 - New roadblocks and Barrier construction **along Road 60** are **seriously hindering the ability of Palestinian farmers to reach agricultural land in Bethlehem governorate**. In Hebron, new closures have been added between Al Arrub refugee camp and the Halhul-Sa'ir partial checkpoint. Communities such as Karma, Khirbet Bism, Deir Razih continue to have no direct access points as all exits from Road 60, except towards Israeli settlements, are sealed with roadblocks.
 - New closures in the area of the settlement of El'azar (Bethlehem) have diminished the ability of farmers from Al Khadr and Artas to reach their 2006 grape harvest. Al Khadr produces 40% of the grapes in the governorate and about 400 families depend on its harvest for their livelihoods.
 - On 14 September, the IDF announced that only Palestinians with Jericho residency and Jerusalem ID holders would be able to exit via the **Jericho DCO checkpoint**, forcing all others to either request a permit or travel on the internal Al Mu'arrajat to reach the rest of the West Bank.
 - With the completion of the route of the Barrier around the Ma'ale Adumim settlement block and the creation of an alternative and more circuitous route (Route 70) between Abu Dis and Anata for north-south Palestinian movement, Road I and access to Road 90 will be completely restricted to use by Israelis.
 - The **"road barrier" in southern Hebron** stretches now for almost 35 km and includes a section where it is built along both sides of Road 325 which leads to the settlement of Tene. According to a survey carried out by OCHA, the "road barrier" has reduced the number of crossings available to shepherds from 45 to 12.
 - The "road barrier", by protecting the road used by Israeli settlers of Ma'on, Karmel, Susiya and the associated outposts, contributes significantly to isolate Palestinian herding communities south of Road 317 from their rangeland and sources of water and services. Further east, in Wadi Al Khalil it restricts almost completely the movement of the Palestinians living in the area and doubles the route students have to travel to reach their schools in Adh Dhahiriya.
 - In the **Old City of Hebron**,⁴ the number of closures reported during July decreased. However, the ability of humanitarian organisations to reach vulnerable populations has worsened especially to those trapped in security buffer zones established around Israeli settlements in the Old City.



- Palestinians residing in the area of Tel Rumeida, Avraham Avinu and around the Tomb of the Patriarchs, the most vulnerable communities in Hebron, are increasingly being cut off from the rest of city by IDF security measures imposed to protect Israeli settlers.

- The number of flying checkpoints recorded by OCHA field staff has remained high during the months of July, August and September with an average of 165 per week. Flying checkpoints severely disrupt Palestinian movement as they are often deployed on key transit roads during morning and evening peak traveling times.

Table 4: Average number of random or "flying" checkpoints observed each week in the West Bank during 2006

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
96	121	142	138	127	142	182	162	151

Source: OCHA field observations - 2006

3. The isolation of the Jordan Valley is further exacerbated by the IDF:

- At the beginning of August the IDF stated that the following categories would be allowed to cross into the Jordan Valley at the checkpoints of Hamra, Tayasir, Ma'ale Efrayim and Yitav:

- a. Palestinians with Jordan Valley residency written in their ID (around 50,000 Palestinians);
- b. Palestinians with permits to work in Israeli settlements in the Jordan Valley (in August 2006 the IDF issued 7,000 permits for non-residents of Jordan Valley to work in settlements);
- c. Jericho ID holders with a "West Bank checkpoint permit".

- Although this removed the uncertainty and confusion which created friction at entry points to the Jordan Valley in recent months, these measures now completely restrict any access by Palestinian land owners residing outside the Jordan Valley (i.e. in Tubas and Nablus).

- Access to Israeli markets for Jordan Valley agricultural produce is now only via the Al Jalameh checkpoint and no longer through Beisan (closed since May 2005). Two permits are currently required to move out agricultural goods: one from the IDF sector commander to move through Jordan Valley checkpoints and one from the IDF Civil Administration to enter the main market of Nablus. Produce crossing into Israel is subjects to the additional requirements associated with the Paris Protocol.

- Palestinian farmers in the Jordan Valley are only expecting to break even this year in anticipation of losses in profits due to the current restrictions on the transportation of agricultural produce. In 2005, the JV Farmers' Union incurred in a 30% loss on revenue due to the combination of restrictions imposed on the transportation of produce to Israel and to West Bank markets.

4. Barrier construction increases the amount of agricultural land inside "closed areas" and restricts movement to Jerusalem:

- There are now an additional 33 Palestinian villages in Ramallah, Jerusalem and Hebron governorates that will face problems reaching their olive groves during the upcoming harvest as they are left isolated on the western side of the newly constructed Barrier.

- The Barrier is considered the harshest form of closure in the Governorate of Qalqiliya.

- Access to Jerusalem for Palestinians carrying West Bank IDs continues to be restricted to the four Barrier crossings of Gilo, Qalandiya, Ras Abu Sbeitan and Shufat. Since January 2006, the crossings available to West Bank Palestinians have decreased from 12 to four. The other eight entry points are now exclusively open to Israeli citizens, including those living in settlements.

- There are approximately 58,000 Palestinians with Israeli "residency" IDs who are now behind the Barrier and have to cross via only four checkpoints to enter the city of Jerusalem.

- The access of Palestinian ID holders living inside of the Jerusalem municipal borders has deteriorated in Khallet An Nu'man (Bethlehem). A new permanent Border Police checkpoint has been established at its entrance and applies Jerusalem entry criteria to all who want to enter it; UN workers are now requested to show secondary ID before entering.

- The Border Police is severely restricting the movement of the approximately 350 Palestinian West Bank residents of Khallet An Nu'man who are forced to negotiate on a daily basis the checkpoint to reach schools, family and markets. Incidents of harassment are reported on a daily basis.

Endnotes

- ¹ The number of closures counted in August 2005 was 376 and is considered the baseline reference number for the Access and Movement Agreement (AMA) of November 2005.
- ² This includes Tulkarm, Qalqiliya, Nablus, Jenin, Salfit and Tubas
- ³ This includes Hebron and Bethlehem
This includes Tulkarm, Qalqiliya, Nablus, Jenin, Salfit and Tubas.
- ⁴ The number of closures reported during July 2006 decreased from 101 (August 2005) to 87. These closures are not reflected in the West Bank closure counting).