

Agricultural production is no longer undertaken for commercial purposes and households are increasingly planting for subsistence only. Access to land has also deteriorated due to the close presence of many Israeli settlements and the expansion of their security buffer zones. The United Nations is already feeding over 1,100 families in the area through direct food aid. This number is likely to increase if subsistence farming declines due to restricted access to farmland.

An estimated 37,000 Israeli settlers live in 12 settlements and five outposts in the Etzion Block with construction ongoing in several of the settlements. The new route of the Barrier will ensure that all the Israeli settlements fall on the 'Israeli side', together with most of the Palestinian villages' agricultural land. Israeli plans indicate that settlement expansion will continue.

Access to land will continue to remain the key issue. Currently, even without the Barrier, access to land is already problematic:

■ To the west of Al Walaja and Battir, Israeli Border Police has been preventing local Palestinians from accessing farmlands adjacent to the railway being constructed along the Green Line.

■ Farmers from Husan are finding it increasingly difficult to reach agricultural areas they own south of road 375, as the security buffer zone of Betar Illit is being widened.

1 - See World Bank, "Four Years – Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis. An Assessment". October 2004

