Overview

This Humanitarian Bulletin coincides with the 50th anniversary of the June 1967 war and the start of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. To mark the occasion, this issue revisits the cases of ten Palestinians who featured in previous OCHA publications, to illustrate some of the enduring humanitarian concerns in the oPt.

Of particular concern these days is the aggravation of Gaza’s chronic electricity crisis, which has undermined already precarious living conditions over the past decade. The drivers of this problem in recent years have included internal Palestinian disputes; limited collection of bills from consumers and related funding shortages to run Gaza’s sole power plant (GPP); the destruction of electricity-related facilities by Israeli airstrikes; and Israeli restrictions on the import of spare parts and equipment, citing security concerns.

In the April 2014 issue of the Humanitarian Bulletin, Abeer al Nemem, a mother-of-11 from Beach Camp, in the Gaza Strip, recounted the difficulties she faced in carrying out the most basic of daily activities due to electricity cuts, such as providing tea or warm milk for her children. Revisiting Abeer three years later, the situation has deteriorated further, following the shut-down of the GPP in April 2017 and the reduction in electricity supply by Israel, at the request of the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority (PA).

These recent developments occurred in the context of an escalation of the decade-long conflict between the PA and the Hamas de facto authorities.

As a result, the majority of the population has been plunged into almost constant darkness and basic services, including health facilities, water supply and wastewater management, have almost ground to a halt, depending almost exclusively on a UN emergency fuel operation. Although the GPP resumed partial operation on 21 June, following the purchase of fuel through Egypt, the situation remains precarious. On 14 June, the Humanitarian Coordinator in the oPt, Robert Piper, warned of the “disastrous consequences of a further reduction in electricity-supply to the Gaza Strip” and called upon “the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and Israel to put the welfare of Gaza’s residents first and to take the necessary measures to avoid further suffering.”

The deteriorating health situation in Gaza, and the difficulties patients face in accessing life-saving treatment outside of the coastal enclave, has been a recurrent topic in the Bulletin. In the January 2017 issue, Siham Al Tatari, a cancer patient, recounted having to interrupt her chemotherapy treatment for seven months and missing two appointments in the Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem before she finally obtained a permit. By June, the cancer had spread to Siham’s bone marrow and, at the time of interview, she was still waiting for a permit for her hospital appointment. The condition of patients like Siham is also affected by the ongoing internal Palestinian conflict: since March 2017, the referral of over 2,000 patients to medical treatment outside Gaza has been disrupted, following the apparent suspension of payments for this service by the PA. This may be resulting in higher mortality rates among waiting patients, including highly vulnerable neonates.

The West Bank topics covered in this Bulletin include longstanding humanitarian concerns: the impact of the Barrier in the Jerusalem area and the rural West Bank; concerns about excessive use of force and the condition of children in detention; communities at risk of forcible transfer; and the many restrictions on building and access to services experienced by Palestinian communities in Area C.

A common concern linking many of these issues is the impact of the Israeli settlements which have been established across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in contravention of international law. The seizure of land for the establishment and expansion of settlements, alongside settler violence and the takeover of land by settler groups, have deprived Palestinians of their property and reduced the space available for them to sustain their livelihoods. Many of the restrictions on Palestinian movement, including the Barrier, which undermine access to basic services and livelihoods, are imposed to protect settlements and facilitate their daily life.

In December 2016, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2334, which called on Israel to take steps “to cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.” However, as indicated by the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nikolay Mladenov in his June briefing to the Security Council, “no such steps have been taken […] while there has been substantial increase in settlement-related announcements […], with plans for nearly 4,000 housing units moving forward and 2,000 tenders issued.”

In a statement issued this month, the Humanitarian Coordinator for the oPt stressed that “from a humanitarian’s perspective, 50 years of occupation represents a gross failure of leadership by many – local and international, Israeli and Palestinian. Too many innocent civilians – Palestinian and Israeli alike – are paying for this abject failure to address the underlying causes of the world’s longest-running protection crisis.”
GAZA'S ENERGY CRISIS
ABEER AL NEMNEM FROM ASH SHATI REFUGEE CAMP, GAZA

Since April, Gaza has been plunged into almost constant darkness after the shutdown of Gaza’s sole power plant. “How can I run a household without cooking gas, electricity and water?!” said Abeer when revisited in June 2017. “It’s catastrophic. It’s now been two months without gas. The (private) gas supplier said our turn for refilling has not come yet. I have a little gas cylinder but this can barely heat food and I use it just for emergencies. I can only cook when we have electricity but this is unpredictable and lasts just for two or three hours maximum. I don’t know when we will have electricity but I must tailor my time around it. It drives me crazy!

Today, for example, my children told me that the electricity would be back at 6 in the evening. If that is true, it will give me just enough time to cook a meal before iftar – breaking the daily Ramadan fast. The other day, we only had electricity around midnight. I had no choice but to make bread as we had run out and I needed bread for the children. Making bread at night is very challenging because the only space I have is the living room where my children sleep. I had to move the sleeping children to my room while I baked. By the time I finished it was just before dawn. When we have electricity during the day I can either cook or make bread, never the two together. I cannot even use a washing machine, as the power supply is weak. I do all the washing by hand.

My daughter is sitting for her final high school exams and she cannot study. We have only two emergency lights, which are not strong enough for reading. I don’t let her use a candle because it is unsafe. I’d rather live in darkness than risk my children’s lives. Blackouts also mean that the water pump is not working and there is no running water to take a shower. Supplies of running water and electricity rarely coincide. When there is electricity there is no water and when there is water there is no electricity. We have running water every other day, sometimes only every three days, and then only for only a few hours a day. The water is very salty and cannot be used for drinking or cooking, only for cleaning the house and taking showers. Showering in salty water hurts my eyes and damages my daughters’ hair. For drinking we refill containers of water from the mosque desalination station, which offers it for free, but it is not always available because the desalination machine is dependent on electricity.

I feel so sorry for my children. There is nothing for them to do and there is no space for them to play. When I was their age, we never had blackouts. We used to play in the streets and were happy. Now the streets are dark. As time passes I feel things are getting worse. We live under blockade. Gaza is a prison where one is shackled and cannot do anything.”
ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE OUTSIDE GAZA
THE CASE OF SIHAM AL TATARI, GAZA CITY

JANUARY 2017

“The closure of Erez and Rafah crossings sentences cancer patients to death”

Siham, a 53-year-old woman from Gaza and a mother of 10 children, was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia in 2013. “This was the beginning of a long, painful and expensive journey,” Siham told OCHA in January 2017. Due to shortages in medical equipment in Gaza and because of difficulties in obtaining a permit for medical checks in East Jerusalem, Siham was referred to Egypt. There, she had to stay for three months, mostly at her own expense, as the Palestinian Authority covers the cost of medical treatment only. While in Egypt she contracted hepatitis C and only learned about it when she was back in Gaza a few months later.

“Last May (2016), I was put on chemotherapy as new cancerous tumors were found in my stomach and hips. The course of treatment ran for seven sessions that had to be completed without interruption every 21 days. I only managed to complete two because the drugs were not sent from Ramallah to Gaza. I waited more than two months and then my doctor referred me to the Augusta Victoria hospital in East Jerusalem. Twice I missed my appointment because I lacked a permit. All I heard from the [Israeli] authorities was that the permit application was being processed. About five months after I first applied, and only after referring my case to human rights organizations and protesting, did I finally get a permit to leave Gaza. A day before coming to Jerusalem, I learned that the cancer has spread to the thyroid.

The repeated closure of Erez and Rafah sentences cancer patients to death. It’s a slow death. We are humanitarian cases. We demand our right to be treated... We just want to be treated and go home. We are not dangerous or a threat to anyone’s security. We should have an open permit to avoid all the difficulties. The permit they give us is valid for one day only. If we encounter a checkpoint in Jerusalem, they send us back to Erez. A one-day permit is not enough.”

June 2007, following the takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas and citing security concerns, Israel imposed a land, sea and air blockade on Gaza that intensified previous access restrictions. Along with the closure of the Rafah crossing by Egypt, the blockade ‘locked in’ nearly two million Palestinians in Gaza, unable to access the remainder of the oPt and the outside world. Exceptions are made for certain categories, including medical patients and their companions who must apply for a permit from the Israeli authorities to cross via the Erez crossing.

The number of exit visas via Erez started to rise after the 2014 hostilities and continued into 2016. However, numbers fell in the second half of the year, including a decline in the overall approval rate for medical patients to 64 per cent versus 77 per cent in 2015. The Israeli authorities have attributed the decline to concerns about the misuse of permits by Hamas.

The situation has been compounded by the ongoing internal Palestinian divide: since March 2017, the referral of over 2,000 patients for medical treatment outside Gaza has been disrupted following the apparent suspension of payments by the Ramallah-based Palestinian government. In April 2017, the World Health Organization reported that three patients from Gaza died while awaiting Israeli permits to access health care in hospitals in East Jerusalem.

Five months later, the cancer had spread to Siham’s bone marrow. From January she returned to Augusta Victoria Hospital once and was put under a new course of four- to six chemotherapy sessions. She missed her June appointment because she did not receive a permit and was still waiting to hear whether she would get one for her 11 June appointment.

“The permit application is still under consideration. I am worried I will miss my appointment again. My doctor told me I cannot have long interruptions between the sessions, and if I don’t make it for the next one I will have to restart the chemotherapy course all over again. I’m dreading it. If the bone marrow cancer spreads, it would necessitate a transplant. I don’t want to go down that road as it’s complicated and very risky. Timely treatment is important to try and stop or slow the cancer’s advancement. I just want to continue with the course without having to start all over again. The first session was exhausting, I felt so sick. On my way back home to Gaza, I fainted and lost consciousness while being searched at Erez. I need a companion but they need a permit, must be above a certain age and a first degree relative. The cost of having a companion with me in East Jerusalem is also unaffordable.

My doctor in Gaza says that having a positive outlook and high morale are important in dealing with cancer. How can I sustain morale when I’m struggling with the most basic of things such as having running water, being able to bake bread without electricity and finding the money to cover my medical treatment. Every time I have an appointment in Jerusalem my husband has to borrow money from his friends! How can I be positive when my university graduate children are unemployed and have no hope of finding a job? My house was damaged during the 2014 war and is yet to be fixed. I have nothing else to sell in the house to cover the transport costs. The recent PA salary cuts were the final straw: my salary has been cut by 40 per cent. I cannot repay the loans I have taken for my medical treatment or buy drugs for the other illnesses I have, let alone afford to buy the nutritious food that my doctor advised to me eat.

To be a cancer patient from Gaza is to be at the mercy of the occupation. It is being sentenced to a slow death by the permit regime, the harsh living conditions, the poverty, and the blockade. We just want to receive treatment and be treated with dignity. We want to live the little time left for us in dignity.”

Published in January 2017, oPt Humanitarian Bulletin

“We want to receive treatment and be treated with dignity”

JUNE 2017

Source: World Health Organization
“Fishing seemed a prosperous business”

Abdallah al ‘Abasi, 53 years old, fisherman, Gaza, June 2013.

Since September 2000, Israel has tightened restrictions on Palestinian access to the sea, citing security concerns. These restrictions have been enforced through the firing of live ammunition, arrests and the confiscation of equipment. While sea restrictions have varied, since 2006 fishermen have generally been allowed to access less than one third of the fishing areas allocated to them under the Oslo Accords: six out of 20 nautical miles (NM), although this has temporarily been extended to nine NM during the sardine season in recent years.

Fish, particularly sardines, is a major source of protein, micronutrients and essential Omega 3 fatty acids for Palestinians in Gaza and contributes to nutritional diversity. The fish available in the six NM area tend to be smaller in size. Israel and Egypt also impose a “no fishing zone” along their respective maritime boundaries with Gaza. Over 35,000 Palestinians still depend on this industry for their livelihoods.

Following Operation Cast Lead in January 2009, the fishing area was reduced to three nautical miles (NM). “From that time our financial situation began to deteriorate rapidly. The fishing catch was only a fraction of what it used to be, both in quantity and in quality. We lost access to the bigger and more valuable fish. The best income we were able to make then was $45 per day versus over $70 previously. On some days, we had no income as we were not even able to cover the cost of fuel. We had to cut our expenses, even on the basic things.”

Published in July 2013 Gaza’s Fishermen Case Study
EXPO S FROM GAZA UNDERMINED BY THE BLOCKADE
MUJAHED AL SOUSY FROM JABALIA, GAZA

MARCH 2015

“We are shocked that Israel is banning the entry of wooden planks”

Mujahed Al Sousy is the general manager of the Sousy Furniture Company in Jabalia. Before the 2007 blockade, the company employed between 150 and 200 skilled workers and exported between 20-25 truckloads each month: 80 per cent went to Israeli markets, 19 per cent to the West Bank and one per cent was sold in the local market in Gaza. With the imposition of the blockade in 2007, the exit of goods was banned and production was limited to the Gaza market, which has a very limited purchasing power. The number of workers the company could employ was radically reduced.

In November 2014, Israel allowed the resumption of furniture transfers to the West Bank for the first time since 2007. However, the hopes of furniture producers were short lived: in February 2015, Israel included wooden planks thicker than 2.5 centimetres in the list of goods banned. This resulted in a dramatic decline in manufacturing activities and a rise in unemployment. In 2010, the export ban was eased slightly to allow the exit of minimal quantities of goods, primarily cut flowers and strawberries to overseas markets only. Following the 2014 conflict, commercial transfers from Gaza to the West Bank resumed, first for agricultural produce and later for textiles and furniture; after March 2015, limited exports were also permitted from Gaza to Israel.

Despite significant progress, a range of other constraints, including restrictions on imports of certain raw materials considered by Israel to have a dual military-civilian use, have resulted in the volume of goods exiting Gaza in 2016 falling by less than 20 per cent from those in the first half of 2007, prior to the imposition of the blockade.

“We face other challenges in transferring furniture out of Gaza. Our shipments must be palletized to only one metre in height and there are steep logistical costs because of the loading and unloading for security … Now we are shocked that Israel is banning the entry of wooden planks thicker than 2.5 centimetres. How can I compete in West Bank markets with all these additional costs and problems?”

A part of the blockade imposed in 2007 following the takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas, Israel completely banned exports. This resulted in a dramatic decline in manufacturing activities and a rise in unemployment. In 2010, the export ban was eased slightly to allow the exit of minimal quantities of goods, primarily cut flowers and strawberries to overseas markets only. Following the 2014 conflict, commercial transfers from Gaza to the West Bank resumed, first for agricultural produce and later for textiles and furniture; after March 2015, limited exports were also permitted from Gaza to Israel.

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“I have been paying out of my own pocket to keep the business going”

“The situation is slightly better, if still challenging,” said Mujahed when revisited in June 2017. “Since 2016, the Israeli authorities have allowed exports of furniture to Israel and have increased the height of pallets from 1 to 1.2 metres.

We now export one truckload to Israel each month and employ about 50 workers. This is a marginal improvement but better than nothing. We were major exporters of solid wood dining tables and chairs. The variety of our products has shrunk and is limited by the type of wood, mostly plywood, that we are allowed to import from Israel.

Our ability to compete is severely challenged by many factors: the ban on the entry of raw materials essential for our main products, dining tables and chairs; the longer power cuts and the increasing price of fuel to operate backup generators; and the high transportation costs for both exports and imports. Prior to the blockade, all shipments took place via the Karni crossing, which is geographically closer to our factory than Kerem Shalom. Loading a truck via Kerem Shalom costs NIS 3,500 to NIS 5,000, while in Karni we used to pay NIS 800 to NIS 1,200.

With the renewal of exports to Israel, I feel like a newborn who is learning about life afresh. We have to start all over again and find new clients in Israel as some of our original clients went bankrupt after the blockade. I would not call what we do now production. We don’t generate a profit and can barely cover our costs. For years we’ve been running at a loss. I have been paying out of my own pocket to keep the business going in the hope that the blockade will be lifted and the political situation will get better.”
THE IMPACT OF THE BARRIER ON THE JERUSALEM AREA
SAMIH ABU RAMILA, FROM KA’FR AQAB, EAST JERUSALEM

“Residents pay municipal taxes... but the municipality wants us to arrange the services by ourselves”

Following a wave of Palestinian attacks, including suicide bombings, Israel began building a Barrier in 2002 with the stated aim of preventing such attacks. The Barrier’s deviation from the Israeli-declared municipal boundary of Jerusalem has resulted in some Palestinian localities in East Jerusalem, especially Kafr ‘Aqab and Shufat camp area, becoming separated from the urban centre. Although residents retain their permanent residency status and continue to pay municipal taxes, these areas have effectively been abandoned by the municipality.

Basic facilities and services are degraded or lacking entirely so residents need to cross checkpoints to access the health, education and other services to which they are entitled as residents of Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority has no jurisdiction in these areas, and the Israeli police and municipality staff seldom enter municipal areas beyond the Barrier, thereby creating a security vacuum manifested in unsupervised wildcat building, and an increase in lawlessness, crime and drug trafficking.

When we complained to the municipality about the lack of educational facilities and the fact that our children had to cross the Wall to go to school, we were encouraged to arrange everything by ourselves as with the health clinic - the Al Bayan Health Centre which we established. Two businessmen and I invested money in the project. We found a suitable building which had a building permit, carried out some renovation work to make it comply with security and health standards, and hired teachers. The municipality came to check it and decided to cover part of the expenses, namely the salaries of the staff, and gave us a status as ‘recognized unofficial.’ As ninety percent of the teachers come from the West Bank, where they are paid less than teachers in Jerusalem, we retain a portion of their salaries to run the school. The rest is covered by student fees and donations from international organizations. Today the school serves 2,300 students from kindergarten to 12th grade. However, there are 1,500 pupils from Kafr Aqab enrolled in schools in areas outside the municipal boundary, such as Ramallah, and 2,200 children who are not enrolled in any school at all.”

“In the intervening years, the school has expanded significantly to cater for 4,000 pupils, both boys and girls, spread over seven buildings,” Samih told OCHA in May 2017. “It still retains its ‘recognized unofficial’ status, with the Israeli Ministry of Education covering only 75% per cent of the teachers’ salaries. Because the school is registered as a private company, it must obtain a certificate of ‘good conduct’ every year from the Israeli authorities. This approval has been contested on the grounds that the company is not paying the teachers their full salaries as required by Israeli law. In 2016, one of the Israeli officials involved in the inspection process demanded a bribe in return for ‘good conduct’ clearance.”

The ‘good conduct’ certificate was refused in January 2017, with the result that the teachers stopped receiving their salaries from the beginning of the year. The Jerusalem Municipality maintains that it lacks the means to take over the school and absorb all the costs so the school faces the prospect of being closed down. I feel as if the school is being punished for keeping our children off the streets and for trying to provide an education for them instead of letting them remain ignorant and uneducated. I am a victim of this conflict between the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality. I understand that the Palestinian Authority cannot officially operate in Kafr ‘Aqab while it remains officially part of Jerusalem under Israeli law, yet I also feel that they have a responsibility to try to find a solution to our problem.”

Published in March 2011 East Jerusalem Special Focus Report

© Photo by OCHA.

“Residents pay municipal taxes but the municipality wants us to arrange the services by ourselves”

“When the Wall was erected, Jerusalem ID holders from neighbouring areas in the West Bank such as Bir Nabala and Ar Ram moved here to Kafr ‘Aqab to maintain their ‘centre of life’ in the city and avoid having their ID card revoked. As the Jerusalem Municipality failed to allocate resources accordingly, services were insufficient to meet the increased needs. However, all these new residents were paying the municipal tax, the arnona, and expected services in return. Residents were dissatisfied with the community centre comprised of people appointed by the municipality. That is why a group of young people, including myself, started looking for alternative ways to serve residents’ needs without challenging, but rather cooperating, with the established political system. We founded an organization, the Company for the Development of Kafr ‘Aqab, to look after the interests of residents and to act as a bridge between residents and the municipality.

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Published in March 2011 East Jerusalem Special Focus Report

© Photo by OCHA.
SUHAIB AL AWAR FROM SILWAN, EAST JERUSALEM

On 5 March 2012, at approximately 4:00 am, Israeli border police arrested 14-year-old Suhaib al Awar from his home in Silwan (East Jerusalem) and charged him with incitement, and stone and Molotov cocktail throwing. He was released on 4 April and put under house arrest for 12 months, four of which were in the custody of his 57-year-old grandmother in Jabal al Mukabber, another area of East Jerusalem. During this period, he was not allowed to leave the house and his grandmother was required to stay with him all the time unless Suhaib’s mother, grandfather or uncle were present. The family had to pay a fine of NIS 5,000 ($1,300), and bail of NIS 50,000 ($13,000) against violations of the conditions of the house arrest. Following the arrest, Suhaib was not allowed to attend school, with the exception of sitting final exams and on condition that his mother accompanied him to school.

When describing his detention conditions, Suhaib said:

“They kept me isolated for five days.”

For the past three years, approximately 700 Palestinian children in East Jerusalem have been detained by Israeli forces every year, usually on charges of stone-throwing and, more recently, incitement to violence in social media. Some of these cases have triggered allegations of abuses during the arrest, transfer and/or interrogation. Also of concern are recent changes to Israeli legislation that allow harsher prison sentences for children convicted of crimes such as stone-throwing, including children as young as 12 who start serving their sentences when they turn 14. Some Palestinian children convicted or awaiting trial have been placed under house arrest. Although preferable than imprisonment for children, this puts additional strain on the families affected.

Since 2013, UNICEF has engaged in dialogue with the Israeli authorities on children’s rights while in military detention. In 2016, following this dialogue, Israeli forces began to replace the practice of night arrests of Palestinian children, in some cases, with a summons procedure, alleviating some of the protection concerns emerging during the first 48 hours of arrest, transfer and detention.

Published in May 2012 Humanitarian Bulletin

MAY 2017

“I had to be my son’s prison warden”

KHULOOD AL AWAR, SUHAIB’S MOTHER

“Suhaib has been in prison for two years now. In June 2015, one day before he turned 18, he was arrested by the Israeli border police who accused him of setting an army jeep on fire. In fact, on that day he was working with his uncle in Tel Aviv all day. When he was about to be released due to lack of evidence, the Shabak (Israeli intelligence) presented new charges: throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at settlers and the army on an earlier date. He was sentenced to four years imprisonment. In the appeal to the High Court, he was offered to plead guilty in exchange for a reduced sentence but Suhaib refused to admit to a crime he had not committed. When I visited him last time he told me he was joining the prisoners’ hunger strike. For 35 days now I have not seen or heard from him.

He was only 13 when he was first arrested at around 7:30 in the morning just before he entered his school in Ras al Amud. Since then, every time something happened in Silwan they would arrest him. In total, Suhaib has been arrested ten times: in some of these cases he was put under house arrest and in others in jail for a total of 21 months, excluding the last two years. All this happened while he was still a child and for allegations of stone and Molotov throwing.

The most difficult of all his arrests was the third one when he was only 14. Everything about it was traumatizing: the arrest itself, the interrogations, the signs of maltreatment and torture on his face and ears, the court hearings. He was put under house arrest for 12 months. Even then he was not left alone: he was taken to the police station five times for questioning. For nights on end Suhaib would not sleep. I would wake up at night and see his eyes wide open. During this house arrest the relationship between us became very tense. I had to be his prison warden at home because his dad and I signed papers that if the terms of house detention were breached, we would pay a fine of NIS50,000.

Suhaib’s detention has transformed my life. I became a woman who is outspoken against injustice. The hardest thing for me is being unable to give him a cuddle, touch him or even take a photo with him. I hurt that he was deprived of his childhood and adolescence. It hurts when my second son, who is only two years younger than Suhaib, feels he has not the freedom to physically be there for him or enjoy his company. It hurts to think that as a released prisoner his job opportunities would be limited.

But Suhaib has remained very ambitious. He is determined to complete his high school exams while in prison. He would like to study political science, journalism or law. He wants to be able to speak freely and without restrictions. I cannot help fearing for his life when he’s released, especially in the current climate. Living in Silwan is like living in a minefield where things could explode anytime. But I have to be optimistic.”
EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE AND LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

MOHAMMED AL AMMASI FROM AL FAWWAR REFUGEE CAMP, HEBRON

I went to the rooftop of my house to watch the clashes…A second later I was shot three bullets in my legs*

Just before dawn on 16 August 2016, large numbers of Israeli soldiers raided al Fawwar refugee camp (Hebron) and conducted a house-to-house search operation. The forces took over multiple rooftops across the camp and deployed snipers. Palestinian youths threw stones and, according to Israeli sources, also Molotov cocktails at the soldiers, who responded with live ammunition and tear gas canisters. During the clashes, an 18 year-old Palestinian youth was shot and killed by the soldiers and another 52 residents were injured, more than half of them by live ammunition. No Israeli injuries were reported.

Mohammed al Ammasi is a 22-year-old resident of the camp: “I went to the lower rooftop of my house to watch the clashes. The house is located on a hill away from the area of the clashes. At one point, I was called by a neighbor to check whether the upper roof of my house could be used by camera men and reporters from two TV channels covering the incident.

As soon as I got to the other roof, I heard an Israeli sniper positioned on a nearby building asking me in Arabic: ‘Where do you want it?’ I did not reply and turned my back. A second later I was shot with three bullets in my legs. One hit my knee and the other one hit my thigh, lodging in my hip. As I fell down shouting ‘Stop!’, the soldier fired another bullet that hit my right hand. I was evacuated to a hospital in Hebron but due to the complexity of my injuries, was transferred to a Ramallah hospital. I underwent two operations and the doctors feared I could have a life-time disability.”

It was only three months ago that I returned to work at the traditional oven that I run with my father. For seven months I had excruciating pain and could not do anything but physiotherapy sessions. My leg has sustained nerve damage and for months I had to wear boots, even at home, as I lost control over the left foot. My left knee moves involuntarily too. I cannot go down the stairs easily and have to rely on my right leg a lot. I cannot walk further than 500 metres before I feel pain and start to limp. I had to buy a car to help me move around, but running a car in the camp is not easy because of the narrow streets and alleys.

My right hand also has some form of disability and the pieces of shrapnel make it hard for me to do many things. Any awkward movement makes it stiff. I cannot bend my hand easily or hold things. The injury left me in chronic pain and has affected my work tremendously.

My work in the oven is mostly physical and entails chopping vegetables and carrying heavy stuff: sacks of flour, potatoes, etc. Now I cannot do many of these things. I mainly do administrative tasks and some supervision. My father is getting old and I was the one who ran the oven, which is our main source of livelihood. I did try to seek justice but did not have any support, connections or someone to instruct me on how to go about it. I wanted to get in touch with an Israeli lawyer to open a file for compensation and was willing to pay the costs. I knew I had a strong case. My shooting was captured live by the camera crew and went viral. The footage shows that I posed no threat to anyone. I could not get a lawyer in time and missed the limited window for opportunity to register the complaint and obtain some justice.”

FIRING ZONES AND RISK OF FORCIBLE TRANSFER

KHALED AL ‘AMOOR FROM KHIRBET SARURA – MASAFA YATTA, HEBRON

“Settlers set our crops alight and killed my donkey”

Since the 1970s, Israel has declared some 18 per cent of the West Bank, or nearly 30 per cent of Area C, as firing zones for military training. A presence in these zones is prohibited by military order unless special permission is granted. Despite this prohibition, there are 38 small Palestinian herding communities with a population of over 6,200 located within these zones. Many of these communities existed in the area prior to its closure.

These Palestinians are among the most vulnerable in the West Bank with high levels of humanitarian need. Most have faced the demolition of their homes and sources of livelihood on the grounds of lack of building permits, which are impossible to obtain. Some have been repeatedly displaced for short periods of time to make room for military training. These and related practices have generated a coercive environment, placing the affected people at risk of forcible transfer.

Case published in May 2013 in Life in “Firing Zone: The Masafer Yatta Communities Case Study

I now divide my time between Ar Rifa’iyya and al Majaz, one of the Masafer Yatta communities within the firing zone,” Khaled told OCHA in May 2017. “For two years after being forced to leave Sarura, I tried to settle in Ar Rifa’iyya but could not. I am used to the herding lifestyle, and the house we moved to was too small for my large family. Eventually, I moved to al Majaz where I own about 100 dunums of land, but had to start from scratch. I had no housing for my family or for my 400 sheep. I had to build a few rooms for my family, a big water well and two animal shelters.

I applied for a building permit but it was rejected by the civil administration on the grounds that this is a firing zone. All the structures now have demolition orders. In the last court hearing, two weeks ago, the judge refused to give us an injunction, which would have meant more time to legalize the structures before they are demolished, but called the Civil Administration to reach an agreement with us.

To sustain our herding way of life we have no choice but to stay in al Majaz, despite all the problems. We tried to move back to Sarura but our caves had been destroyed and the water wells poisoned by the settlers. As al Majaz is more isolated, we do not suffer from settler violence but meeting basic needs is more expensive. Due to the poor roads, I have to pay up to 60 shekels per cubic meter of tankerred water instead of 20 that I would pay in Sarura. The same applies to transportation. A return journey from al Majaz to Yatta, the closest town, would cost 300 shekels in a taxi, and you don’t always find taxi drivers who agree to do it.

Wherever we go, we are persecuted by the Israeli authorities and their planning regulations. They just want the land without the people. But we have no alternative. We don’t have permits to work in Israel. We are not craftsmen and do not have professions or higher education. Herding and farming is what we know. This is our way of life.”
The four herding communities of the al Baqaia area of the northern Jordan Valley: Mak-hul, al Hadidiya, Khirbet Samra and Khirbet Humsa (population around 500) are in Area C. Due to the restrictive planning regime, no schools can be built in this area and in the 2010-11 academic year, 166 children from these four communities had to travel to between 27 and 45 km to reach their primary schools. Roughly half of them attended schools in Tubas and Tammun towns, which required them to cross one of the two checkpoints into the area (Hamra and Tayyasir). Residents, including the driver of the school bus, reported frequent incidents of mistreatment and humiliation by Israeli soldiers who ask the children to get off the bus to be searched.

Abdul Rahim Bisharat, a 62-year-old resident of al Hadidiya, told OCHA:

“To complete school, children go to Tammun and stay there during the week, while their parents remain in the community. One of the older children looks after the others in town. As a result, there is often little supervision of the children or support available to help with homework. For example, I have eleven children between the ages of 7 and 17 years living in the same apartment alone. In general, children either do not succeed at school or get homesick and want to return. I would say that around 80 percent of children drop out. The level of education of this generation is actually lower than that of their parents. If the roads were open and access to school not limited by checkpoints and other obstacles placed by the Israeli army, access to education would be easier.”

A direct road connecting communities to schools in that area, bypassing the checkpoints, is blocked by a road gate that is only opened infrequently. Residents estimated that less than 10 percent of the children take the high school matriculation exam (Tawjihi).

“Many families were forced to leave al Hadidiya due to the lack of schools,” said Abdul Rahim when revisited in May 2017. These families had no one to take care of their children in Tammun or Tubas, where many of our children had to stay in rented accommodation during weekdays, all by themselves, to be able to attend school. In November 2015, to tackle the problem of families leaving and school drop outs, we secured international funding to buy a school bus to make daily return journeys and to pave the road. A few days later, the road was demolished by the Israeli authorities, along with another 26 structures.

But, we did not give up. We agreed that the school bus would wait on the main road and I would use my tractor to take the children to the bus. Never mind the rain and the cold, and the fact that the children used to get wet, what really bothered them most was being covered with mud from the tractor and arriving to school dirty. My daughter came to me one day and said she didn’t want to go to school because the children were laughing at her, saying she was dirty.

Access to education has improved somewhat and costs have greatly diminished since the bus is now administered by the Palestinian Ministry of Education, but the long detours of between 27 and 45 km, and the lack of proper access roads to our communities to pick up the students, remain a challenge. Although al Hamra and Tayaseer checkpoints are partially staffed, we still suffer. The soldiers there are like the winter sun: they appear out of the blue and start delaying the children used to get wet, what really bothered them most was being covered with mud from the tractor and arriving to school dirty. My daughter came to me one day and said she didn’t want to go to school because the children were laughing at her, saying she was dirty.

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Impact of the Barrier on Agricultural Productivity
Tayseer Amarneh from Akkaba, Tulkarm

February 2014

“Even saplings and plants need coordination before they are allowed to cross”

Tayseer Amarneh of Akkaba village in Tulkarm owns 230 dunums of land, mostly planted with olive trees. To access his land isolated between the Barrier and the Green Line, Tayseer requires a special permit. Data collected by OCHA over the past four years of olive harvests in the northern West Bank show a permit approval rate of about 55 per cent.

For those farmers granted permits, access to land behind the Barrier is through designated gates. During the 2016 olive harvest there were 84 gates, of which only 9 opened daily; 10 opened some days during the week and during the olive harvest; and 65 only opened during the olive harvest. The Akkaba gate used by Tayseer only opened three days each week for three periods of 15 minutes.

The limited allocation of permits, combined with the restricted number and opening times of the Barrier gates, impedes essential year-round agricultural activities such as ploughing, pruning, fertilizing, and pest and weed management. As a result, there is an adverse impact on olive productivity and value. Data collected by OCHA in the northern West Bank show that the yield of olive trees in the area behind the Barrier has reduced by approximately 65 per cent in comparison with equivalent trees in areas accessible all year round.

Tayseer explained: “There are complicated procedures at the gates regarding the type of agricultural materials and equipment we are allowed to take to our land behind the Barrier, and this directly affects the quality and type of work that we can carry out. Many times, the soldiers at the gate refused to let me pass with my tractor when I needed it to work on our land; it was the same with agricultural tools such as saws, which I need to prune my trees. They told me to go to the Palestinian DCO to coordinate to allow these materials to cross. Even if you receive a permit you are at the mercy of the soldiers who are responsible for opening and closing the gate. We sometimes wait for hours until the soldiers come and let us through. Agricultural tools, fertilizers and plants need pre-coordination to be allowed through the gate, which means that we call the Palestinian liaison officers, who call the Israeli liaison officer and coordinate the entry of the material. There are two Israeli military officers who open the gate, and the Border Police and army both need to be informed. Recently at the gate, the Border Police said that they had not received any written notification that I wanted to bring fertilizers onto my land while the army said that they had received it. They did not allow us carry the fertilizers through until a fax was sent from the Israeli liaison to the Border Police. These policies are reducing the amount of land planted behind the Barrier as farmers are getting frustrated and do not want to take the risk of planting and then not receiving a permit to cultivate or harvest.”

OCHA revisited Tayseer in May 2017:

“In Akkaba, 223 residents are eligible for agricultural permits, including seasonal permits for the olive harvest. Since the beginning of 2017 only 27 permits are valid in the village. I used to have six employees to work on my land; now I have none because they cannot obtain permits because of the new regulations. Only one of my sons has a permit but he is studying in the university and cannot help me except during the holidays, when the gate is usually closed. Nowadays, some farmers are choosing not to plant their land at all because they are afraid of not obtaining a permit and losing all their harvest.

Even if you receive a permit you are at the mercy of the soldiers who are responsible for opening and closing the gate. We sometimes wait for hours until the soldiers come and let us through. Agricultural tools, fertilizers and plants need pre-coordination to be allowed through the gate, which means that we call the Palestinian liaison officers, who call the Israeli liaison officer and coordinate the entry of the material. There are two Israeli military officers who open the gate, and the Border Police and army both need to be informed. Recently at the gate, the Border Police said that they had not received any written notification that I wanted to bring fertilizers onto my land while the army said that they had received it. They did not allow us carry the fertilizers through until a fax was sent from the Israeli liaison to the Border Police. These policies are reducing the amount of land planted behind the Barrier as farmers are getting frustrated and do not want to take the risk of planting and then not receiving a permit to cultivate or harvest.”

Rate of approval of «Seam Zone» permits for the olive harvest season: Salfit, Qalqiliya, Tulkaram & Jenin governorates

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Salfit</th>
<th>Qalqiliya</th>
<th>Tulkaram &amp; Jenin</th>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>58%</td>
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1- In the original case, Siham was referred to by the pseudonym Salma.

2- Some private schools are recognized ‘unofficially’ by the Israeli authorities and supported financially by the municipality to compensate for the shortage of classrooms in the municipal system. Other, more-recently established ‘recognized official’ schools, are termed ‘contractors’ by the other providers in that they are considered primarily profit-driven and receive most of their expenses from the municipality.

3- The case was the subject of a report on the Israeli Channel 10 programme (http://m.nana10.co.il/article/1245380?sid=120&pid=55&service=10tv).

4- The family paid a total of NIS15,000 in fines. Almost every time Suhaib was detained the family had to pay money to release him.

5- The only time his mother was allowed to hug him was when her father passed away and she went to deliver the news. Suhaib was serving his 21-month prison sentence.

6- Under Israeli legislation, residents of the West Bank or Gaza cannot claim damages for harm suffered if they do not inform the Ministry of Defense in writing within 60 days of the incident.

7- In the original case, Khaled al-‘Amoor was referred to by the pseudonym Mohammad.


   In 2016, there was a 74 per cent reduction in yield in Tayseer’s olive trees behind the Barrier in comparison with his trees on the ‘Palestinian’ side to which he has free access.

9- These restrictions apply to a minimum area of land and land ownership documents are required before Palestinian landowners can apply for a permit to cross the Barrier. See Humanitarian Bulletin, April 2017, Increased restrictions on access to agricultural land behind the Barrier. https://www.ochaopt.org/content/monthly-humanitarian-bulletin-april-2017.