

**THE NGO
WORKING GROUP ON
ISRAEL/PALESTINE**



Briefing Paper on the Separation Wall

December 2003

The Non-governmental Working Group on Israel Palestine is a coalition of organizations that have met since 1999 to share information and advocate for peace, security and a just resolution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The Working Group is made up of policy, humanitarian and faith-based organizations accredited by the United Nations. We support the centrality of the UN and the role of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 in achieving resolution of the conflict. We also seek to interface with, and offer support to, other local, regional and international organizations working towards a sustainable peace in the Middle East region.

The NGOs represented in our Working Group have colleagues on the ground in Israel Palestine whose observations provide an alternative source of information to the dispatches available from government and news agencies. This briefing paper draws on their experiences to report on the separation wall and its effects on the daily lives of ordinary people on the ground. The information contained in this briefing paper is intended to humanize the facts that are readily available, presenting a different perspective on the separation wall.

The continued expansion of the separation wall results in growing humanitarian consequences for Palestinian civilians, making it the most urgent matter of concern in the work for a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Although the Israeli government defends its actions in the name of security, we believe that the separation wall creates greater insecurity for both sides. We also remain very concerned about the wall's long-term effects on the peace process. We firmly support the views of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, as expressed in his report of 28 November 2003, which stated:

“I acknowledge and recognize Israel's right and duty to protect its people against terrorist attacks. However, that duty should not be carried out in a way that is in contradiction to international laws, that could damage the longer-term prospects for peace by making the creation of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State more difficult, or that increases suffering among the Palestinian people.”

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1. The scope and impact of the wall

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the current wall is a wide expanse (60 to 100 meters wide) of concrete walls, trenches, roads, razor wire and electronic fences. It also includes guard towers at regular intervals. While the current wall is only 180 km, Israel projects the final length to be 687 km, stretching from Jenin in the northern West Bank to the southern-most tip of Hebron in the south. The attached map demonstrates the projected course of the wall in the northern section of the West Bank.

When the wall is completed, OCHA estimates that 210,000 acres of land will lie between the wall and the armistice lines of 1949. This means 14.5% of West Bank land will be effectively annexed by Israel. Moreover, 274,000 Palestinians will remain on the Israeli side of the wall, living in closed areas or enclaves between the wall and the green line. In addition, more than 400,000 other Palestinians living on the east side of the wall will be affected, cut off from their farms, jobs and services.

In short, the wall will have severe humanitarian consequences for approximately 680,000 Palestinians, around 30% of the West Bank population.

2. The wall and the international community

The construction of the separation wall has few advocates in the United Nations system. During the General Assembly special session of 21 October 2003, resolution ES-10/13 was approved by a recorded vote of 144 in favour to 4 against, with 12 abstentions. The text of the resolution demanded that "Israel stop and reverse the construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, which is in departure of the Armistice Line of 1949 and is in contradiction to relevant provisions of international law."



1. The wall in Jayyous and its impact on food security

Alain Epp Weaver from the Jerusalem office of the Mennonite Central Committee reports from farmers he has met in Jayyous who have been denied access to their land. One Palestinian farmer, named Muntaser Qreishi, used to access his land by donkey cart in forty minutes. However, the route of the separation wall has cut him off from his fields, and the trip now takes over two hours – provided the gate through the separation wall is open. When the Israeli army keeps the gate closed Qreisha has no way of farming his land. In September the gate was closed for 20 days during the Jewish holiday season.

In Jayyous one morning, Epp Weaver watched as farmers waited for many hours before Israeli soldiers opened the gate that gave access to their farmland. Once the gate was opened the soldiers told the villagers that only persons over 38 were allowed to cross. This prompted one elderly man to ask: "Why can't my sons enter? How can I farm the land myself?"

The dire consequences for Jayyous and other Palestinian agricultural communities is becoming increasingly clear. Not only are farmers in Jayyous separated from 8600 dunums (2300 acres) of their fertile farmland, but Israeli bulldozers have already leveled over 500 dunums (125 acres) for the construction of the fence uprooting around 4000 trees. The village's economy is on the verge of being shattered.

2. The 'Seam Zone'

Several updates have been sent from humanitarian organizations working in Jerusalem and the West Bank describing the experiences of Palestinians caught between the separation wall and the Green Line. This area is called the 'seam zone', and the Israeli government has announced that 13,545 people living in this area will have to apply for permits to continue living and traveling in their land. These permits will only be valid for up to six months.

Jbarra is one of 15 villages presently caught between the separation wall and the Green Line. The area has been declared a closed military zone and the people have been forced to rely on food aid, despite the fact that they own fruit trees. One worker from Christian Aid reports how people have begun to relocate from their homes to tents in the seam zone so as to access their farms, pick their fruit and water their trees. This is illegal by Israeli law as Palestinians are not allowed to stay in the closed zone overnight, but these people violate the law in a desperate move to save their crops.

Families that are caught in the seam zone have to pass through a gate in the wall to go to school. A volunteer from the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine Israel (EAPPI) spoke to one mother who crosses through the wall and walks to the village with her children each day. In the afternoon they wait in the sun together, often for several hours, until the soldiers arrive and allow them back through the gate into the seam zone where they live. If the gate is not open, the children cannot get to school.

3. Comments from religious leaders

The Working Group has received many comments from religious leaders and heads of the Churches in the region. Some of these religious leaders are represented in the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) that has recently urged churches worldwide to increase their protests against the development of the wall.

Condemnation of the separation wall has come from all religious denominations, from the Pope to the Church of Scotland. Archbishop Pietro Sambi, apostolic nuncio in Jerusalem, said: "a wall has never been a sign of peace; it hasn't been and it isn't." He has let Israeli government officials know that the barrier cuts monasteries, convents, churches and cemeteries in half. The Rev. Clarence Musgrave of St. Andrew's Church in Jerusalem points out that: "by virtue of the fact that it is so far from the green line and takes in so much land, I can't accept this argument about building it to keep out suicide bombers."

Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Palestine and Jordan calls the wall, "a wall of insecurity." He worries about the Palestinians in the seam line: "This means they can enter neither Israel nor the West Bank." If they want to enter the West Bank, "then a soldier must open a door for them." Younan argues that the barrier threatens to undermine hopes for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "This land does not need more walls, it needs justice," he noted. "A wall will only bring more hatred and more bitterness. The wall must not be built. Instead, the money should be used to make peace and security for both peoples. It is time for reconciliation."

The following page illustrates the projected path of the separation wall according to Israeli military sources