



Fact Sheet: Siege and Closure

- The siege and closure on the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), dramatically tightened by Israeli occupation forces since October 2000, have essentially **placed three million Palestinians into a series of collective jails**, far tighter than at any other time since 1967 (even during the first Intifada). Israel has imposed a **closure** of international borders, sealing off the Gaza strip and West Bank from Israel, from neighbouring countries, and from occupied east Jerusalem. Furthermore, it has imposed a **siege** on Palestinian towns, villages, and refugee camps, severely restricting movement **within** the OPT. In addition, Israeli troops often place communities under total **curfews** during incursions into areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) or in the Israeli-controlled sector of Hebron, essentially a form of collective house arrest.
- In the West Bank, checkpoints and roadblocks have sealed off nearly every village and refugee camp, creating at least 64 isolated fragments, while the Gaza strip has been divided into at least three parts. **Restricted movement impacts every aspect of economic and social life**, including businesses, schools, hospitals, and PNA institutions. Relatives find it difficult to visit families (especially those imprisoned in Israel), students cannot go to school (or are stranded away from home), access to places of worship is curtailed, fishermen cannot ply their trade. Moreover, Palestinians are routinely subjected to humiliating and degrading treatment at checkpoints, including threats at gunpoint, verbal harassment, invasive body searches, and arbitrary prohibitions on movement.
- Siege and closure have a **devastating economic impact**, especially given the dependency of the OPT on the Israeli economy cultivated by successive Israeli governments since 1967 (95% of all Palestinian exports go to Israel). Earnings of the approximately 120,000 Palestinians who used to work in Israel before the al-Aqsa Intifada, which constituted 25% of the labour income of the Palestinian economy, have evaporated. Internal movement restrictions are also severely disruptive for business, and poverty and unemployment levels have dramatically increased (to 50% and 39.8%, respectively). During the last quarter of 2000, the Palestinian economy contracted by 50%, mainly as a result of siege and closure.¹

¹ For comprehensive studies of the impact of the closures on the Palestinian economy, see reports produced by the United Nations Special Coordinator's Office (UNSCO), www.unsco.org.



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- Siege and closure as forms of **collective punishment** are forbidden under international humanitarian law.²
- Israeli soldiers at checkpoints frequently prevent or delay the evacuation of sick and wounded Palestinians to hospital, in violation of international humanitarian law. During the al-Aqsa Intifada, **27 Palestinians have died as a result of prolonged obstructed access to medical care** by Israeli occupation forces.³ In many cases, deaths occurred after Israeli soldiers detained critically ill people at checkpoints for hours only a short distance from hospital.
- **The OPT have been under varying forms of closure since 1967.** The introduction of a magnetic card system in the late 1980s signaled a dramatic tightening of external and international closure. A complicated and often arbitrary system of permits was developed during the 1990s, making contact and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians *more* difficult during the “peace process.”

The area of the Gaza strip most severely affected by closure is **al-Mawasi**, a highly fertile agricultural zone on the southern part of the coast, between Khan Yunis and Rafah. Al-Mawasi is home to 8,000 people, mostly farmers and fishermen, who live under a de facto apartheid system on the edge of a bloc of illegal Israeli settlements. It is completely closed off except for two checkpoints, through which only residents of the area can enter. They can only enter on foot, during daylight hours, in small groups, and often after enduring humiliating and degrading treatment at checkpoints. Ambulances and relatives of residents cannot enter the area. Inside, wide and well-paved roads for settlers run parallel to paths reserved for Palestinian use, while electric fences and military patrols separate the settlements from Palestinian communities. Land belonging to several of the local farmers has been illegally seized for use by settlers, who occasionally attack and harass Palestinian residents or destroy their greenhouses and fields. Four Israeli army checkpoints regulate movement within al-Mawasi.

² “No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed” (Article 33, Fourth Geneva Convention).

³ Between 28 September 2000 and 29 December 2001.