



Association of
International
Development
Agencies

INTERNATIONAL AID AGENCIES CALL FOR FREE AND UNRESTRICTED MOVEMENT FOR ALL

September 28, 2003 will mark three years of the "Al Aqsa" *Intifada*. In that time several political initiatives have failed to stop the cycle of violence and destruction. Even today, closure and curfew continue to prevent millions of Palestinians from moving freely within the West Bank and Gaza strip.

The latest political initiative, the "Road Map to Peace", has not improved the situation despite the fact that it calls on Israel to "take all necessary steps to help normalize Palestinian life." There are still more than **450 barriers** in the West Bank¹ that severely limit Palestinian access to health, education and other basic services. Ambulances still face unacceptable delays at these barriers. Education has been disrupted and students and teachers waste hours crossing checkpoints.

The situation for the 1.2 million Gazans is desperate as well. External closure has sealed Gaza off; the average Gazan has very little hope of ever leaving Gaza. Internal closure also affects local residents. In places like the Mawasi enclave where 5000 Palestinians live, access restrictions have led to shortages of medication and patients are being denied access at checkpoints. Teachers and students have also been unable to reach schools.

Armed checkpoints, gates, earth mounds, ditches and concrete roadblocks daily obstruct and humiliate West Bank Palestinians in their normal lives. Rather than building the foundations of peace, this situation is increasing the frustration of Palestinians. In addition, the building of the Wall, is confiscating Palestinian land and barring Palestinians from basic services. Because of its routing, some 120,000 Palestinians in the West Bank will be trapped on the Israeli side of the Wall, and some 200,000 Jerusalem Arab residents will also be cut off from any access to the rest of the West Bank once the barrier is completed².

The restrictions of movement and access seen in places in the West Bank and Gaza contravene key international laws and conventions, in particular articles 53, 55, 147 and 59 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and Article 11 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights.

The undersigned organizations find this situation unacceptable and call on the Government of Israel to respect applicable International Law. We also call on the international community to uphold the laws and regulations agreed upon, and to increase their efforts to ensure the full application of international law by signatory members.

Academy for Educational Development (AED)
American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA)
CARE International
Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP)
Cooperation for Development
Near East Foundation
DIAKONIA

¹ OCHA estimates.

² PENGON estimates.

Japan International Volunteer Centre (JVC)
Lutheran World Federation
Medical Aid For Palestinians – UK
Medcins Du Monde – France
Medcins Du Monde – Greece
Medcins Sans Frontiers - Greece
Mennonite Central Committee
Movimiento Por La Paz, El Desarme Y La Libertad (MPDL)
Norwegian People's Aid
Paz Y Tercer Mundo (PTM)
Premier Urgence (PU)
Save the Children - Sweden
Solidaridad Internacional
Solidarite Socialiste (FCD)
Swedish Organization for Individual Relief (SOIR)
Terres Des Hommes
UNA International Services
World Vision Jerusalem - West Bank - Gaza

Life Before and After the Road Map

Ambulance delays and denials of access

(documented by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society)

| | Before Road Map | | After Road Map | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-------|----------------|------|
| | April | May | June | July |
| No. of delays and denials | 25 | 73 | 70 | 33 |
| Total delay in hours | 40 | 40:20 | 44:30 | 43 |
| Cases denied access | 6 | 16 | 16 | 6 |

(documented by Machsom ("Checkpoint") Watch, an Israeli group)

| | Before Road Map | | After Road Map | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----|----------------|------|
| | April | May | June | July |
| Number of cases denied access | 23 | 28 | 24 | 22 |

Restrictions on Movement

A survey by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) conducted on 25th July documented checkpoints, roadblocks, earth mounds and ditches sealing off villages and towns in the **Northern West Bank**.

- 48 IDF armed checkpoints
- 30 gates (unconnected to the Wall)
- 229 earth mounds
- 36 ditches
- 53 concrete roadblocks

= **396 barriers in total**

On the 27th of July, the Israeli Defence Forces removed six barriers:

- The armed checkpoint and earth mound at Surda;
- The armed checkpoint at Beit Jala;
- The armed checkpoint at Beit Sahour
- The armed checkpoint at Nokdim, south of Bethlehem;
- A road block at Junction Route 60 near Hebron.

The Surda armed checkpoint has since been replaced.

The Ein Areek permanent road block has since been reimposed in the form of two dirt mounds.

At the end of July 2003, the Palestinian Ministry of Planning reported 133 permanent military checkpoints in the entire West Bank.

The Road Map calls on the Government of Israel to:

"take all necessary steps to help normalize Palestinian life" and to "take measures to improve the humanitarian situation...Israel and Palestinians (should) implement in full all

recommendations of the Bertini report to improve humanitarian conditions, lifting curfews and easing restrictions on movement of persons and goods, and allowing full, safe, and unfettered access of international and humanitarian personnel.”*

*A set of recommendations to the Government of Israel, written by Ms. Catherine Bertini, Personal Humanitarian Envoy of the UN Secretary General, August 2002

Israeli checkpoints: inconvenient, dangerous, and in some cases fatal

With the recent round of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, the Government of Israel has stated that they will ease restrictions for humanitarian aid organizations carrying out work in the West Bank and Gaza.

Day-to-day experiences with checkpoints in the occupied West Bank paint a very different picture. On Monday, June 2nd, 2003, five humanitarian aid employees from one organization spent a total of 18 hours waiting at checkpoints. In all cases the cars were marked with the logos of the humanitarian agency involved. Here are their stories:

One late afternoon, Mohammad, a 35-year-old field manager, was returning from project sites in the West Bank to his home in Al-Ram, a village between Jerusalem and Ramallah. He was stopped at the Jab'a checkpoint, located one kilometre from his home, and was forced to wait in his car from 5:30pm until midnight. Between 11 and 12pm, soldiers allowed people to cross the checkpoint on foot. Mohammad joined them, leaving his car in a nearby village and walking the 30 minutes home.

Nabeel, a 32 year old field manager, spends an average of six hours each day travelling from his home in Bethlehem to his office in Ein Areek – normally a 45-minute commute by car. Because of three permanent checkpoints, Nabeel now has to travel first by car, then by taxi, and finally, for the last three kilometres, on foot. On Monday, a fourth mobile checkpoint was added, delaying him another hour.

Roger and Beatrice, international support staff, were on their way to visit a project partner in Bethlehem when they were stopped without explanation for an hour and a half at the checkpoint between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. "These checkpoints and security measures manufacture frustration," said Roger, "It eats into a lot of our time, which is just wasted, and we can't always carry out our humanitarian aid work in a timely manner."

With a four-wheel-drive vehicle sporting his organization's logo, Robert, a 27-year-old international staff member, was able to circumvent the checkpoint at Bir Zeit (outside of Ramallah) on his journey from the field back to the home office. However, he was held up at the Jab'a checkpoint from 1 to 3:30 p.m. When the Israeli army's District Liaison Officer was finally reached for comment, he said that there was a "high alert" and that there was a "security sweep" in progress.

Unfortunately, this seems to be the case every day in the Occupied Territories.

For regular Palestinian citizens, checkpoints are more than just an inconvenience.

Um Mohammad, a Palestinian mother of four, lives near the town of Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza. Her home is sandwiched between a settlement and its surrounding fence. The only way to cross the fence is through a gate which is only open between 6 to 8 a.m. and 2 to 4 p.m. "Sometimes the gate doesn't open at all if there is military activity, or if the soldiers say there is a security problem," she told us.

Um Mohammad must cross through the gate to buy food, to take her 2 1/2 –year-old asthmatic daughter to the clinic, or to walk her older children to school. On one occasion, when her daughter was suffering from an asthma attack, the soldiers forbade her and her daughter to pass the gate. Her daughter survived the attack, but Um Mohammad worries that the next time could be fatal.

On August 28, 2003, Samar, a 32-year-old woman from a village near Nablus, had a baby at a checkpoint approximately 3 kilometres from her home. Samar reported that she was denied access at the Beit Furik checkpoint by Israeli soldiers and that her husband Qais helped her give birth. The couple's daughter died moments after being born.

Her husband explained: "In the early morning Samar and I went to the checkpoint while she was in labour. I asked the soldiers to let us pass to the hospital in Nablus. After waiting for about 75 minutes, Samar's situation was getting worse but none of my attempts helped us pass the checkpoint.

"Finally I was forced to place my wife behind a rock 20 meters away from the checkpoint to help her give birth. I didn't know what to do! Later, I had no solution but to cut the umbilical cord using two stones. Unfortunately our newborn baby passed away after a few minutes."

After the soldiers found out that the woman had given birth and that the infant had died, they let the couple pass. Qais carried their baby's dead body to the Rafidia hospital in Nablus where the physicians confirmed the newborn's death.

Samar is still in shock. Since the incident she has been unable to move her hands properly due to the trauma of holding her dead baby.

PHOTOS DEPICTING RESTRICTED ACCESS



Figure 1 The main blocked entrance to the village of Yassouf, one of the villages in the Salfet area. Photo Brian Duss/ World Vision/July 2003.



Figure 2 The Yassouf block and shows teenagers carrying floor tiles back to back from one end of the blocked road to another. Photo Brian Duss/World Vision



Figure 3 Israeli soldiers randomly stop and search cars at a flying checkpoint near Bir Zeit University. Photo Brian Duss / World Vision