



PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

PCHR Disengagement Fact Sheet No. 2

The real story ... the purpose of disengagement is to:

- **Influence Public Opinion**

The 'disengagement plan', first announced in December 2003, has yielded widespread international support and has been portrayed in the media as a bold and courageous peace initiative by the Israelis. The members of the Quartet issued a statement after the announcement of the plan "welcom[ing] and encourag[ing] such a step, which should provide a rare moment of opportunity in the search for peace in the Middle East".

However, in reality the 'disengagement plan' is none of these things and is a sophisticated public relations exercise designed by the Israelis to secure international public support. Israel needed to ensure support for their continued illegal practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)¹ which was waning in the face of greater advocacy of the suffering of the Palestinian people under 38 years of occupation.

- **Portray Sharon as the 'Dove of Peace'**

The 'disengagement plan' also allows the Israelis and, in particular, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to hold themselves out as peacemakers to the international community without ending the occupation, allowing Palestinians to realise their right of self-determination and taking responsibility for their past and continued breaches of international law.

The removal of approximately 8,500 settlers in the Gaza Strip and settlers from 4 small settlements in the northern West Bank (approximately 9,500 settlers in total) allows Israel to show the international community the 'sacrifices' that they are making in the name of peace. In reality, the pull-out from these areas comes after a clinical analysis by the Israelis of the financial and military commitment required to protect a small number of settlers (2.3% of the approximately 415,000 settlers illegally living in Palestinian territory) against the ideological and strategic interest of strengthening activities in the West Bank territory including occupied East Jerusalem.

The unilateral nature of the initiative means that it is outside of any negotiations with Palestinian leaders and key issues such as the large settlement blocs in the West Bank, the status of Jerusalem, the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people, return to pre-1967 borders, the right of return of Palestinian refugees and responsibility for Israel of past breaches are off the negotiating table for the foreseeable future.

¹ The illegality of Israel's actions in the OPT was most recently confirmed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in their advisory opinion on the *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the OPT* (July 2004). Amongst other things, the ICJ held that settlements established by Israel and the construction of the Wall in the OPT are in breach of international law. Further, the ICJ found that all states are under an obligation not to recognize the illegal situation and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the construction of the Wall.



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Such steps have allowed the Israelis to successfully dictate the terms of the peace process – for the last one and half years the ‘disengagement plan’ has dominated the agenda at the expense of long-term solutions.

- **Create “facts on ground” in the West Bank**

The disengagement plan allows the Israelis to stall on final status negotiations while continuing to create “facts on the ground” that will alter the outcome of the final settlement in their favour.

The real purpose of the plan is to allow the Israelis to concentrate their efforts on the West Bank territory. This much has been openly admitted by Ariel Sharon since the initial announcement of the plan: “in the framework of the disengagement plan, Israel will strengthen its control over those same areas in the Land of Israel which will constitute an inseparable part of the State of Israel in any future agreement”. Recently in May 2005, the Israeli Defence Minister, Shaul Mofaz, stated that “In fact, the settlers of [West Bank] and Gaza will be able to say in years to come that they helped establish the eastern frontiers of the state of Israel”.

The ‘disengagement plan’ will allow the Israelis to strengthen their control over the West Bank territory. An area which Benyamin Netanyahu claims that “as much as two-thirds, if not three quarters, are uninhabited lands” – a hark back to the old Zionist principle of a land without a people for a people with out a land.

The expansion of settlement activities includes the construction of the “E1 corridor” (another road which Palestinians are prohibited to travel on). It will connect the large illegal settlement bloc of Ma’ale Addium with occupied East Jerusalem and effectively divide the West Bank in two.

The construction of the Wall, in many places deep inside the territory of the West Bank, has been accelerated and is expected to be completed by the end of 2005. The current construction of a Wall is an attempt by Israel to consolidate control over the OPT and annex large settlements blocs to Israel. It is an attempt by Israel to establish permanent borders – “facts on the ground” – which will prejudice the final status talks.² The current attempts to transfer settlers into and then isolate occupied East Jerusalem also form part of Israel’s strategy, also condemned under international law, to permanently annex Palestinian land.

- **And it’s working ...**

On 14 April 2004, responding to a letter from Prime Minister Sharon explaining the content of the ‘disengagement plan’ and asking for support from the United States, President George W. Bush welcomed the proposal as a step that would “mark real progress toward realizing my June 24, 2002 vision, and make a real contribution towards peace”. He concluded that “in light of the new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of the final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949 ...”. Such statements by the Bush Administration prejudice the outcome of final status solutions and

² The ICJ in their recent advisory opinion also came to this conclusion: “The Court considers that the construction of the wall and its associated régime create a “fait accompli” on the ground that could well become permanent”.



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reward Israel for their illegal settlement activities while compounding the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian people.

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