



## PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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### PCHR Disengagement Fact Sheet No. 3

#### Institutionalising the *Intifada*: The reality of disengagement for the people of the Gaza Strip

- **Closures and curfews – no freedom of movement**

During the implementation of the ‘disengagement plan’ the Israeli military is planning on imposing comprehensive closures system all across the OPT and, especially, in the Gaza Strip.

Such closures will result in Palestinians being denied access to their land, employment, family, education and medical facilities. The system of closures will be between communities, between the West Bank territory and the Gaza Strip and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and the outside world. The situation will be especially acute for those Palestinian communities which are encircled by or are very close to Israeli settlements. In these areas residents are already subjected to extra-ordinarily strict entry and exit policies. These communities include al Mawasi (approximately 5,800 residents), al Siafa (190 residents) and al Ma’ani (180 residents) in the Gaza Strip.

The system of closures is nothing new to the Palestinian people and has characterised the belligerent Israeli occupation, now in its 38<sup>th</sup> year. It is directly responsible for the humanitarian crisis in the OPT which, according to reports published by the World Bank in 2004, has resulted in 47% of Palestinians living below the poverty line and 16% of Palestinians in deep or “absolute” poverty and not being able to afford to meet their basic survival needs, despite humanitarian assistance.<sup>1</sup> The situation is even more critical in the Gaza Strip where the poverty rate is at 68% and, according to UNOCHA, expected to rise.<sup>2</sup>

However, during and after the implementation of the disengagement plan the system of closures will be institutionalised and long-term.

During the implementation of the plan Palestinian civilians will be trapped in their homes and villages while 25,000 Israeli soldiers and border Police remove people and property from the settlements.

Purposeful confusion on the part of the Israelis still surrounds the actual date when disengagement will take place (the start date has been delayed many times but is currently ‘anticipated’ to be around 15 August 2005) and how disengagement will be implemented – for instance it is not known how long ‘disengagement’ will take. However, it is anticipated well before the actual implementation of the plan that wholesale closures will be instigated on Palestinian communities and the actual ‘disengagement’ will take approximately six weeks. It is predicted that the removal of Israeli property will take up to another three to four months.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank, *Four Years – Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis: An Assessment*, October 2004, available at [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org).

<sup>2</sup> UNOCHA, *Review of the Humanitarian Situation in the occupied Palestinian territory in 2004*, April 2005, available at [www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org).

<sup>3</sup> UN OCHA Briefing on the Disengagement Plan, Jerusalem, Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2004.



## PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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The humanitarian situation for Palestinian civilians who rely on food or medical deliveries from UNRWA, the Red Cross and other organisations will also be difficult as a result of the closure regime. International organisations are currently being facilitated, for the first time since the *Intifada* began, in storing limited food supplies. This will ensure that limited services can be delivered despite the positioning of extra checkpoints external to the Gaza Strip which will further hamper humanitarian access.

### • **Compound the economic, social and cultural suffocation of the Gaza Strip**

The humanitarian crisis that has characterized the current Intifada in the Gaza Strip will be institutionalised under the ‘disengagement plan’. Israel will continue to control access to the Gaza Strip by land, sea and air and thus the daily lives of the approximately 1.4 million Palestinians trapped inside. As the World Bank commented in their 2004 report on anticipated effects of the ‘disengagement’ plan on the Gaza economy “Without a major reform of the [Israeli] closure regime, ... the Palestinian economy will not revive”<sup>4</sup>.

The import of goods and services and the export of agricultural and other products from the Gaza Strip will be at the pleasure of the Israelis who will control all borders and crossing points, including the only international border with Egypt (Rafah International Crossing). Further, the airspace and territorial waters will also continue to be under the authority of the Israelis – under the plan Palestinians are prevented from reopening the international airport located in the southern Gaza Strip and prohibited from building a new port that had earlier been destroyed.

What is clear is that the suffocation of the Gaza economy will continue through the permanent established of devices which ensure:

- the permanent economic separation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank;
- control of trade with the outside world by ensuring that the Gaza Strip cannot form direct trade routes through international gateways in the Gaza Strip.

The World Bank predicts that the poverty rate in fact climb under the disengagement plan to as high as 72% in the Gaza Strip by 2006 and unemployment will increase a further 6% during the same time frame.<sup>5</sup>

Restrictions on the freedom of movement of Gazans will also continue. Such restrictions will limit Palestinians based in the Gaza Strip from accessing universities abroad, advanced medical facilities not available in the Gaza Strip and employment opportunities.

The Israeli military, will control Rafah International Crossing Point, and will continue to be able to impose arbitrary restrictions on the movement of Palestinians as they have done throughout the current

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<sup>4</sup> World Bank, *Disengagement, the Palestinian Economy and the Settlements*, June 2004, at pp. i. Available at [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



## PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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*Intifada*.<sup>6</sup> Further, the current system of preventing Palestinian workers from entering Israel will be comprehensively institutionalised by 2008 when no worker will enter Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, the plan will also compound the isolation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank in social and cultural terms. The Gaza Strip will be permanently disconnected from the West Bank – families continue to be separated, cultural ties already strained will completely disappear and the process of nationhood dealt a permanent blow. The unified Palestinian nation identity will be a dream.

The ‘disengagement plan’ is seen as a peace initiative yet it will compound the suffering of the Palestinian people and institutionalise the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, between April 2004 and February 2005 the Israeli military prevented Palestinians males aged between 16 and 35 years from travelling through Rafah International Crossing Point.

<sup>7</sup> Since the declaration of the *Hudna*, or cease-fire, at any given occasion no more than 5,000 Palestinians have been allowed into Israel to work. Before the *Intifada* this number stretched past 50,000. The humanitarian consequences of these restrictions have been remarkable reducing huge swathes of the civilian population to abject poverty.