

Ecumenical
Accompaniment
Programme
in Palestine
and Israel



ChainReaction

Issue No 5, 2007

The quarterly magazine of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel

The background of the cover is a photograph. In the foreground, several strands of barbed wire are stretched across the frame, some forming a large arch. Behind the wire, a church with a prominent cross on its roof is visible. The church is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting either sunrise or sunset. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall mood is one of tension and hope.

How long
O Lord?

Editorial



By Rifat Odeh Kassis
EAPPI International Programme Coordinator
and Project Manager

Dear readers,

In 1977, the General Assembly called for the annual observance of the 29 of November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On that day, in 1947, the same Assembly adopted the resolution on the partition of Palestine.

In another resolution on 1 December 2004, it again requested the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights, as part of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November, to continue to organize an annual solidarity day on Palestinian rights in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations. It also encouraged Member States to continue to give the widest support and publicity possible to this Day of Solidarity.

I believe that the reason for all these resolutions is the feeling of the assembly that the 1947 resolution committed a major injustice against the Palestinian people. The resolution intended the creation of two states for both nations, but it was never completely enacted.

Israel managed to find its seat within the international community whereas the Palestinians became a refugee problem and a nation seeking self-determination and freedom. The resolution, which was taken to divide the country, was done in a rush and in an irresponsible way. The countries that took the decision did not understand the context. Instead of calling for one state where Jews and Arabs would each enjoy self-determination, these same countries choose to divide the country as an easy solution. This "easy" solution paved the way to one of the world's greatest tragedies and resulted in continuous bloodshed between the two people.

The UN Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people should not be only just another day, but a day to remind the world that the injustice needs to end. Israel needs to end its occupation and the Palestinians should be able to at last see the realisation of their rights. The same countries responsible for the resolution on the partition of Palestine in 1947 should be the ones to carry out this task.

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Web Sites:
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Cover Photo: by Gemma Abbs.
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Issue No.5, 2007

Much ado about nothing?

The relevance of international law in the Middle East conflict

By **Christiane Gerstetter**
(Ecumenical Accompanier)

“Almost all nations observe almost all principles of international law and almost all of their obligations almost all of the time”, stated Lou Henkin, a famous international law scholar from the US, in 1979. One wonders whether the late Henkin would have wished to modify this statement had he taken a closer look at how the State of Israel has complied with its obligations under international law so far. There is a myriad of international legal instruments pertaining to the Middle East conflict and stipulating obligations for both Israel and its neighbouring countries. They include binding international agreements which are not specifically designed for the Middle East conflict - international human rights treaties and international humanitarian law such as the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel has ratified several human rights treaties and the

Geneva Conventions. In addition, there are numerous other more specific resolutions by the UN Security Council and General Assembly, and, let us not forget, the recent 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, which states the illegality of the separation barrier in its current form under international law.

None of the states in the region, and especially not Israel, seem to feel any urge to bring their behaviour into compliance with what is set out in these instruments, however. As some of the articles in this issue of ChainReaction will show in more depth, Israel obeys its obligations under international law almost none of the time. It is true to say that in many cases, and not only the Israeli one, compliance with international law is less automatic than with domestic law. What happens when a

state does not comply? There is simply no police to send in to enforce international law. Moreover, not all international law is legally binding. A big part of international law is so-called ‘soft law’ - declarations, resolutions and other documents that state what states should do, but do not legally bind them. While international human rights treaties and the Fourth Geneva Convention, which deals with the behaviour of an occupying power in the territories occupied, are legally binding, this is not true for resolutions of the UN General Assembly and with few exceptions for resolutions and recommendations by the UN Security Council. Equally, an ICJ Advisory Opinion like the one on the legality of the Separation Barrier is - as one might guess- only advisory, i.e., non-binding in nature.

Yet more UN resolutions have been



adopted concerning Israel, than most other member states of the United Nations. Why is it that with such regularity the UN bodies adopt new resolutions aimed towards a more peaceful and human rights observant Middle East? Window dressing by diplomats that have nothing better to do? The answer is obviously a bit more complex. Firstly, it can generally be observed that although the degree of compliance with international law is lower than what can be observed within domestic legal systems, it is equally true that many countries comply with their international legal obligations most of the time. Recent research by political scientists has convincingly demonstrated that there are several factors why states do often comply with international law, among those that the competent decision-makers at state level consider it normatively

desirable to do so, because international law is incorporated into municipal law (for which the compliance record is much better) or because a state's government fears for its reputation and resulting negative consequences, e.g., that other states will decrease foreign investment or political support.

Let us take a look at the last one of those: reputation. Very often, and especially when it comes to universally applicable pieces of international law like human rights treaties or the Geneva Conventions, the rules contained in international law are the written embodiment of a moral consensus. Most of us would agree that nobody should be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention to cite just one example of a human rights norm that the Israeli state continues to violate in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Very often, and especially when it comes to universally applicable pieces of international law like human rights treaties or the Geneva Conventions, the rules contained in international law are the written embodiment of a moral consensus.



Governments in general are quite reluctant to appear as the bad guys—those that act against the moral and political consensus embodied in international law. It's bad publicity. Rather than admitting that they are in breach of international law, governments tend to try to interpret the law in a way that they would not be breaking it. This is what the Israeli government does when it comes to the Fourth Geneva Convention. This Convention regulates how an occupying force is supposed to behave in the territory it occupies. For example, the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the permanent transfer of civilian population to the territories occupied. Rather than admitting that the Israeli settlements are therefore illegal under international law, the Government of Israel goes to great lengths to explain why the

Fourth Geneva Convention is not applicable to Israeli behaviour in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (this can, for example, be found on the website of the Israeli Foreign Ministry).

The fact that governments, among them the Israeli government, try to avoid appearing to be acting against their obligations under international law has something to say about how important they think compliance with international law is for their reputation. Even if a government does not ultimately comply, there is the possibility to capitalise on the fact of non-compliance for other actors. NGOs doing advocacy in Israel and Palestine, for example, frequently use international law as a yardstick against which to assess the behaviour of the Israeli army and other state bodies in the Occupied

Palestinian Territories. Their success may sometimes only be minor when it comes to inducing more lawful behaviour of Israeli state actors. However, by evoking relevant international law as a moral, neutral yardstick for how states in general and the Israeli state in particular should behave, they manage to generate a great deal of political solidarity with Palestinians suffering from human rights violations. This in turn may enable them to directly alleviate some human suffering. Its character as a moral yardstick for state behaviour is thus one of the more indirect ways in which international law may help to foster justice in the Middle East.

A second way in which international law becomes effective is via enforcement not through international bodies, but through

domestic courts, both in Israel and in other countries. For example, the Israeli High Court in several cases explicitly recognised that Israeli authorities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories were bound by public international law. Accordingly, it decided that measures like the construction of the Separation Barrier or roads could only be taken where they were needed for “security” reasons, but could not be taken for other purposes, such as to make the life more comfortable for the Israeli settler population. Still, as some Israeli human rights lawyers put it, the Israeli High Court tends to alter details of Israeli measures in the Occupied Territories while ignoring the overall picture.

It is, however, not only Israeli courts that may be helpful in enforcing international legal obligations. It is also courts in other countries. Over the last two decades or so, the observance of human rights, the avoidance of war crimes and compliance with International Humanitarian Law have come to be seen as a concern of the international community as a whole, irrespective of where a violation of international law occurs. Courts, advocates and prosecutors in different countries have gradually become more active in taking action against foreign nationals committing war crimes or gross human rights violations. For example, victims of the 1982 massacres in Sabra and Shatila recently filed complaints against the

then Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. These complaints were filed before a court not in Israel, but in Belgium. In 2003, a Belgian appeal court considered the complaints, in principle, admissible. If more states start to consider grave breaches of international humanitarian law or human rights treaties a matter of universal jurisdiction and not one of national sovereignty, military and political leaders all over the world may become more hesitant to commit such breaches, because they may face legal consequences as soon as they leave their own country.

So there are several reasons why international law is worth the paper that it is written on - and much more than that. Even though some states do not always comply with international law, and the Israeli government has been especially reluctant to do so, international law is far from useless for bringing about a just solution and respect for human rights in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Quite to the contrary, it contains important guidelines about what a just peace in the Middle East could look like. Last but not least, in reflecting a majority position among the international community, international law is also an appeal to the conscience of each individual that is part of that community. An appeal to speak out against violations of international law, especially human rights abuses. Hopefully then, in the not too distant future, good old Lou Henkin will be proven right also in the Middle East.

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Christiane Gerstetter is a lawyer with a focus in international law from Germany. She served as an Ecumenical Accompanier from December 2005 to May 2006.



Israeli Settlements

Illegal “facts” on the ground

by Jeff Halper

Israel's building of settlements in the Occupied Territories, including East Jerusalem, is absolutely forbidden under international law. Article 49 of the Geneva Convention which governs situations of occupation states unequivocally: “The Occupying Power shall not...transfer parts of its own civilian population into territories it occupies.”

Nonetheless, Israel has engaged in a project of “creating “facts on the ground” ever since the Occupation began in 1967, but particularly since 1977, when the Begin government was elected and Ariel Sharon became the head of the Ministerial Committee on Settlements. Through a complex Matrix of Control, including settlement “facts,” the Begin

government sought (1) to completely incorporate the West Bank and East Jerusalem into Israel proper; (2) to render Israel's Occupation irreversible by prejudicing any negotiations before they begin; and (3) to foreclose any possible Palestinian state, and certainly a truly sovereign and viable one. To date Israel has constructed more than 200 settlements, some 300 if one includes "outposts."

There will be a Palestinian state. Israel needs one to get the Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories, almost four million on number, "off its hands." To make it look credible Israel might even make a "generous offer:" 85% of the territory for a Palestinian state. That sounds generous indeed, but the issue is not only territory; it's also a matter of control and resources. For if a Palestinian state has territory but no control of its borders, no freedom of movement either internally or to neighbouring countries, no control of water and its richest agricultural land, no meaningful access to Jerusalem which accounts for 40% of its economy and no control of its airspace or communications, then it becomes a prison, a Bantustan a la South Africa in the days of apartheid.

This is the heart of the issue. In his "convergence" or "realignment" plan presented to a joint session of the

American Congress in May, 2006, Prime Minister Olmert presented a plan for an expanded Israel and a truncated Palestinian Bantustan based on Israel's annexation of seven settlement "blocs." These blocs, comprising about 15-20% of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, effectively control the entire country between the Mediterranean and the Jordan Valley, reducing the Palestinians to a "state" on 4-5 "cantons" (Sharon's term). True, Israel relinquishes small settlements deep in Palestinian areas, but it maintains the large blocs containing 80% of the settlers.

The settlement blocs are:

- The Jordan Valley settlements which control both the border with

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Jordan and the water resources of the Jordan River;

- The “Western Samaria” Bloc around the city of Ariel which cuts the West Bank in half between the major cities of Qalqilyia, Jenin and Nablus in the north and Ramallah in the center while also keeping under Israeli control the major water aquifer of the West Bank;
- The Modi’in Bloc which connects the Western Samaria Bloc to the Jerusalem area, anchored in the new city of Modi’in which straddles the “Green Line” and which takes some of the Palestinians’ richest agricultural land;
- Three blocs which make up a “greater” Israeli Jerusalem: Givat Ze’ev, Ma’aleh Adumim and the

Etzion Bloc. Jerusalem is being transformed from a city into a region, one which controls the entire central portion of the West Bank, separates Ramallah from Bethlehem and Hebron in the south, isolates Palestinian parts of Jerusalem from the wider Palestinian society and fragments Palestinian East Jerusalem into a mere collection of ghettos surrounded by massive Israeli settlements inside “greater” Jerusalem; and

- The Hebron Bloc, a salient coming up to the city of Hebron from the south to connect the Israeli settlements there to Israel.

These settlements blocs represent Israel’s “bottom line.” They annex to Israel the major settlement areas of

the West Bank and East Jerusalem while truncating the Palestinian areas into a series of “cantons” that, if given statehood, will be nothing but a non-viable, semi-sovereign Bantustan. To further ensure that the Palestinians cannot negotiate a genuinely viable state, Israel has created a last, ultimate “fact on the ground:” the Separation Barrier, a complex of walls and fences five times longer than the Berlin Wall and, in populated Palestinian areas, walls more than twice as high as the Berlin Wall, all intended to unilaterally determine the borders of the Bantustan.

The result of all this is, in the opinion of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), a new apartheid situation - one about which President Carter has warned in his recent book: *Palestine: Peace or Apartheid*. Olmert’s “convergence plan” is apartheid. It establishes a permanent regime of separation (Jews from Palestinians) in which one group structurally dominates the other group forever. Apartheid means “separation” in Afrikaans, and Israel calls its policy one of *hafrada*, separation, as reflected in the official name of the Barrier - the Separation Barrier. The question remains: will the international community stand back and allow a new apartheid regime to emerge before our eyes, and in the Holy Land no less?



(Jeff Halper, an anthropologist, is the Coordinator of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions <www.icahd.org>. He was nominated for the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize together with the Palestinian intellectual and activist Ghassan Andoni. He can be reached at <jeff@icahd.org>.)



Denial of Rights

By Elizabeth Burroughs
(Ecumenical Accompanier)

In the Christian Orthodox calendar, August 28th is the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. On that day every year hundreds of Palestinians, both Catholic and Orthodox, set out at 3 am to walk from Rachel's Tomb near Bethlehem to the Tomb of the Virgin Mary at the foot of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. It is a very happy occasion with much singing and praying along the way. Some Muslim families have been known to join in. The walk ends with a mass at the

'Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state'

(Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Tomb of the Virgin. Then the walkers head for the city's market and the cafés.

Ellen (name changed to preserve anonymity) first took part in the procession about 35 years ago. Her husband had been very ill but, following much prayer, he recovered. In gratitude for his recovery, Ellen made a solemn vow that every year that he lived she would take part in the August 28th procession.

Ellen and her family have been actively involved in peace education and non-violence training for many years. During the first Palestinian uprising (1987-92) she was active in sit-ins, peaceful demonstrations and funerals, nothing more. But as a result of these activities, she has since 1991 been considered by the Israeli authorities to be a security risk. For this reason, she can no longer get a permit from the Israeli authorities to go into Jerusalem from Bethlehem.

Before the present Palestinian uprising, which broke out in September 2000, Palestinians resident in the Occupied Territories required permits for travel between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and from both of them to enter East Jerusalem and Israel, but they were not required to have permits for travel within the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, after 2000 the freedom of movement of Palestinians within the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem has become progressively

more restricted - with Israeli-manned checkpoints, physical roadblocks, settler-only roads and now the separation barrier.

Anyone who needs to pass through a checkpoint has to clear a set of hurdles in order to obtain an Israeli permit from a District Civil Liaison Office (DCL). According to a joint report by two Israeli groups, at these DCLs Palestinians encounter hidden violence - the violence of bureaucracy. Permits are issued or refused by the Israeli authorities in what appears to be a completely arbitrary fashion with no consistency and no transparency in a system that is both inefficient and inadequate for the size of the task.

For several years, Palestinian Christians who wished to take part in the procession of the Feast of the Assumption were allowed to do so whether or not they had an Israeli permit. But about two years ago, the rules changed - permits were now required.

According to the Israeli authorities, Palestinian Christians are normally permitted to go to Jerusalem for religious reasons. However, when Ellen went to the Israeli District Civil Liaison Office to apply for a special permit, she was refused. In tears she pleaded with the soldier on duty - to no avail. In the end she said to him, 'I made a solemn vow but, because of you, I cannot keep it. I therefore hold you responsible.' Last year, Ellen did not even bother to

apply for a permit.

The walk still takes place. My Arabic teacher, a Catholic who lives close to the Wall, told me that she herself used to love to go. Alas, she too can no longer get a permit. It seems that few people can. "To forbid us to go to Jerusalem - it breaks our hearts," she said.

Su'ad, an Orthodox Christian who lives in Bethlehem, used to work at the branch of the Israeli Ministry of the Interior in East Jerusalem and is still in close touch with many of her former work colleagues, most of them Israeli. She is regularly invited to family celebrations such as weddings and bar mitzvahs and she always used to try and attend. Unfortunately, she can no longer do so as she is unable to obtain a permit. She has also tried to obtain permits to attend Orthodox Church events in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Haifa but has always been refused.

Nader Abu Amsha is a Christian who lives in the Bethlehem area. He is the director of the East Jerusalem YMCA's renowned Rehabilitation Programme and travels all over the world to speak about the programme. He tells me that he has not been to Jerusalem since the middle of 2001 - five years ago - and was even refused a permit to go to the Israeli Hadassah hospital for medical treatment. In August, an ecumenical service of prayers for peace was held in St Stephen's Basilica in East Jerusalem. Priests and prelates from

all the Christian denominations and representatives from all the Christian organisations were present - but not Nader.

The United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that during the Christmas holiday in 2003, 2,785 permits were issued for Palestinian Christians residing in Bethlehem - "a number unable to satisfy all Christians wanting to travel to Jerusalem." Applicants also had no control over the dates on which they were allowed to enter. For example, an Orthodox Christian wishing to enter Jerusalem on the Orthodox Christmas Day, 7th

January, could receive a permit only for 24th December. It seems that things are no better now and may even be worse.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'everyone has the right to freedom of movement within the borders of each state'. These rights are being denied to thousands of Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. Jerusalem is a city that is holy to three faiths - Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Although people come from all over the world to visit the holy sites, those closest to them are prevented from being able to worship there.

For several years, Palestinian Christians who wished to take part in the procession of the Feast of the Assumption were allowed to do so whether or not they had an Israeli permit. But about two years ago, the rules changed - permits were now required.



Ramadan at Bethlehem checkpoint

By Michael Ophilant
(Ecumenical Accompanier)

'...all protected persons shall be treated with the same consideration by the Party to the conflict in whose power they are, without any adverse distinction based, in particular, on race, religion or political opinion'. (Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention)

Bethlehem 300 checkpoint, Friday 6th October

We arrived at the checkpoint just after ten am to the sound of sound bombs going off in three successive explosions. As we approach the checkpoint it is clear that the pressure today would be greater than usual as cars are parked all the way past Caritas Hospital on both sides. Our worst fears are realized as we turn the corner to the checkpoint. A huge crowd of people are standing around the gate and as we get to the entrance of the gate a jeep is

forcing people back down the hill. A soldier is also using his gun - thrusting it into a crowd of women - aiming and hitting them in their chest area.

The crowd is angry and the soldiers are numerous and vicious, lobbing sound bombs into the crowd. One hits someone on the head and one finds its way back to the soldiers and explodes. The soldiers find this funny and laugh and there is a huge amount of back slapping going on. A young female soldier is driving the jeep which attempts to run me over as I stand watching in horror as the soldier with the gun - known as Rambo - assaults the women. She on the other hand drives the jeep and screams at me and the Palestinians. She looks so out of place and I actually feel sorry for her as she attempts one soldierly thing



after another and fails. How sad I think, she should be worrying about her matriculation farewell banquet or being in love and exploring the breadth of life. Yet here she is trying to look strong and failing dismally. As she bears down on me, believing she has the right of way, my vest is recognized and a colleague stops her and asks me to move.

The crowd on the other hand is being battered all the time and pushed back down the hill as jeep after jeep arrives to control the 'dangerous' Palestinians. A barricade is erected and people's permits are being checked at the barricade. Women though, are being let through along with children. The men are angry and agitated and they begin to respond to the soldiers angrily. One man is arrested. There goes his permit, I think to myself. His anger has cost



him his livelihood. Some of the women are still being pushed back with guns. Every effort is being applied by the police and the army to be obfuscatory, no effort being spared to make this journey to Al Aqsa mosque impossible. One by one people turn back. When I ask why they shrug their shoulders and just move on.

The jeeps push the people back more decisively now and everywhere there are children with guns trying to act soldierly and failing, but succeeding in being cruel nonetheless, screaming and waving their weapons arbitrarily at people. Eventually the crowd is moved to the bottom of the hill and I cannot work out why other than they do it because they can, and the helpless, powerless people who simply want to go to the mosque not 8 kilometres away, comply. Another man loses his cool and screams back

at the soldiers as people trickle past the barricades. Eventually at 12 noon the crowd is down to around twenty. Now it's too late to get to Al Aqsa for Friday prayers. 'No peace' says one protester referring to our vests. 'It is all in the air. Do you hear what I am saying'?

I would estimate that there had been around 3000 people at the checkpoint. There were buses that had brought people in from all over the southern West Bank. The IDF must have known that there would be this many people on the first Friday of Ramadan so why they were unprepared is astonishing. Plans and responses were made up as they went along. In the end they complied with their rules, but did nothing to make the transit dignified and peaceful. It would anyway have been too late to make it to the mosque. Another wasted trip. Another day in the life of the occupation.



'.....all protected persons shall be treated with the same consideration by the Party to the conflict in whose power they are, without any adverse distinction based, in particular, on race, religion or political opinion'

(Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention)

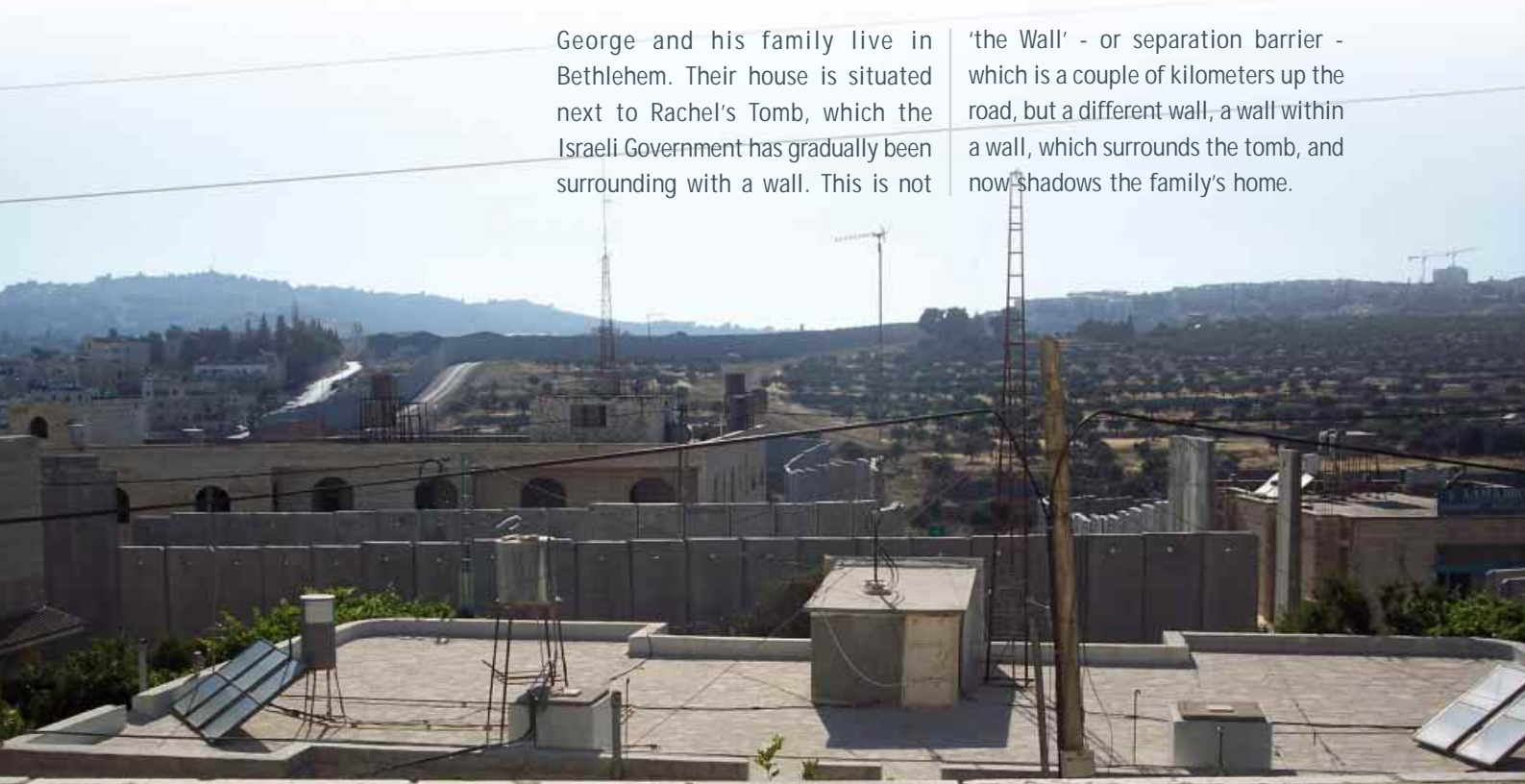
Living in the Shadow of the Wall

By Gemma Abbs

“...the occupying state shall be regarded only as administrator.... of public buildings, real estate, forests, and agricultural estates.....situated in the occupied country. It must safeguard the capital of these properties, and administer them in accordance with the rules of usufruct.” In other words, the occupying power cannot take over or use territories or private properties in the occupied territories to serve the interests of its civilian population. Article 55 of the Hague Convention (Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague II); July 29, 1899)

George and his family live in Bethlehem. Their house is situated next to Rachel's Tomb, which the Israeli Government has gradually been surrounding with a wall. This is not

'the Wall' - or separation barrier - which is a couple of kilometers up the road, but a different wall, a wall within a wall, which surrounds the tomb, and now shadows the family's home.



George lives with his six children, his mother and brother. They are a Palestinian Christian family. George's property comprises a large hotel and restaurant and the family used to run a thriving business. However, in 1996, the Israeli army arrived and life has never been the same since.

Soldiers took over the top three floors of the building and blocked it off so the family couldn't access it. They also took over the restaurant. They used the water and electricity and now George has bills for thousands of shekels which he is obliged to pay. He went to the Palestinian Authority asking for help, but they told him he has a business so what's he complaining about. The Israelis, of course, offered him no compensation and the electricity company refused to cancel the debt.

The army have been present in the building on and off since 1996, using it as an observation post. It overlooks the refugee camp next door - Aida Camp. Sometimes snipers would shoot at people in the camp. George told us how he has been searched going into his own house, how the



Credits: ven to the recent teac

soldiers would come and search the house in the middle of the night and scare the children. One time his wife was hit by the butt of a gun whilst trying to protect her son. She needed medical treatment, but the soldiers refused to let her out to get to hospital. Another time, they tied up his mother, Carmen, and locked her in a room.

George showed us the restaurant, on the ground floor of the building. A



thick layer of dust covers the chairs and tables. Almost everything in the restaurant has been destroyed. Every plate and glass has been smashed. Empty bottles of vodka were left abandoned on a table after the soldiers last left the place.

George shows us pictures of two of his cars which were destroyed by the soldiers, and pictures of army jeeps parked in front of his house. Even though we are using an Arabic translator, we can see from his eyes how desperate George is. He doesn't know how to earn a living any more; his restaurant and hotel have been destroyed and he has no money for repairs. He has no way to pay the mounting bills. Even though the army left two weeks ago, he doesn't know when they might be back. They cut off access to the rest of the building with barbed wire and told the family not to go up there. I wonder why they don't do something, try to cut the wire at least, but it becomes clear that they are scared of what the army will do when they come back. George asks us, "What are we to do, there's no where to go, no one left we can complain to. All of this was designed to force us to leave our house. But this is our home and we will not leave". We have no answers. All we can do is say we're sorry, promise to keep visiting and tell others about his story.



See also: UN General Assembly Res 48/41: Human rights in the territories, Dec 10th 1993
This article has been published in The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, December issue.

Continued from Page 2

This edition of ChainReaction looks at international law and some of the United Nations resolutions concerning Israel and Palestine, which have never been implemented over the last 59 years.

It will be exactly 40 years next year since the occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. The Palestinian struggle continues, and the international community continues to watch without taking action to implement a single United Nations resolution.

The 29th of November marks the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinians but also the longstanding hypocrisy of the international community.

Is this really 'A world fit for children'?

By Kimendhri Pillay, Ecumenical Accompanier

The United Nations has developed various resolutions addressing the needs of every child, including the right to education. During my stay as an EA in Tulkarem, I have heard and witnessed numerous accounts of children's rights being violated on a daily basis as a direct result of the occupation. This article looks at the horrific effects of the occupation on school children, looking at the constant obstacles that face children and their families.

In October 2002, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 27/2, entitled: "A world fit for children". This resolution aimed to "give every child a better future". This resolution claims that progress had been made since the commitment made for children 11 years previously at the World Summit for Children. Sadly this has never translated into a reality for Palestinian children. The lives of Palestinian children continue to deteriorate.

A World Fit for Children

According to "A world fit for children", some of the principles and objectives to be achieved are:

- Principle 5: Educate every child, giving them access to primary education.
- Principle 6: Children must be protected against acts of violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination.
- Principle 7: Children should be protected from the horrors of armed conflict. Children under foreign occupation must be protected, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law.





All the above principles have been violated in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Checkpoints and their effects on children side-lined

Much international attention was given to the recent teachers strike; however the impact of checkpoints on access to education is comparatively ignored. Teachers around the West Bank were on strike at the beginning of the school year, due to salaries that had not been paid for 7 months. Is the blame rightfully placed on the funding cutbacks due to the elected Hamas led government

and on teachers? Israel as the occupying power is required to provide free education for all school children. Both the international community and the occupying power are failing in their duty to school aged children all across the Occupied Palestinian Territories. However, access to schools encompasses more than just the recent closures, which have been at the top of the media agenda locally. Even local Palestinian media are missing the main point. A recent article by Mohammed Daraghmeh: "Palestinian strike imperils school year", speaks in great length about how the teachers strike



is detrimental to the education of children. He further states that parents are unsure whether to blame the Hamas led government or the teachers. The focus on how checkpoints, acts of violence and the occupation in general add to the burden of children travelling to and from school, have been sidelined by the focus on the strike.

There are many examples of random acts of violence carried out on children at checkpoints. For instance, the soldier that threatened to hit a child; the soldier that mentioned he is ordered to shoot at any Palestinian that does not follow orders of security; the soldier that shoots at a

vehicle while there are child onlookers in the nearby vehicles; the soldier that rudely screams out orders to humiliate the parents of these children in their presence, the soldier that instructs men to lift up their clothes before their families and strangers. Travelling through a checkpoint each day, being forced to open your school bag for the soldier, and witnessing violence clearly affects the emotional health and mental state of children, leading to nightmares, bed-wetting, and lack of concentration at school.

Consequences of the Occupier not providing access to Education
By not addressing the salary cut of

Palestinian public servants, especially teachers and furthermore not providing alternative means of education for Palestinian children, the following problems have arisen, to name just a few:

- 1 Parents changing their child/ children from public school to a private school which they cannot necessarily comfortably afford
- 2 Children using escapisms such as lengthy hours of playing with their friends in the street and lengthy hours of television
- 3 Children assisting parents in the family business or children working themselves as vendors
- 4 An increase in conflict with bored children amongst their siblings

The UN World Health Assembly Adopt Resolutions for school children

The World Health Assembly reported, "...Palestinians attach great importance to education." Is the poor access to education of Palestinian children then a strategy of the occupiers to make access to education a struggle for the Palestinians who according to the WHO report have proven to value education? WHO further reports that "85% of those between 5 and 17 years of age attend schools. This percentage has dropped by more than 50% in the past seven months because of closures, communication disruption..." World Health Organisation (WHO) - 54th World Health Assembly Adopted 16 May 2001, pg 5.

Conclusion

Rahman, a Muslim from New Zealand expresses that, "Until the Palestinian people have a viable country that provides them with access to employment and a decent standard of living, adequate health care, education and freedom of movement, they have little hope for the future".

The picture of Palestinian children thus far appears bleak unless all Palestinian voices are heard and international pressure is strongly expressed with the result of a positive change by the occupiers.



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World Council of Churches (WCC)

is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement whose goal is Christian unity.

The WCC brings together more than 340 churches, denominations, and church fellowships in over 100 countries and territories throughout the world, representing some 400 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of denominations from such historic traditions of the Protestant Reformation as Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed, as well as many united and independent churches. While the bulk of the WCC's founding churches were European and North American, today most are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Pacific.

The Roman Catholic Church is a full member of many national ecumenical and several regional ecumenical organisations and has a regular working relationship with the WCC.

The Churches Commission on International Affairs (CCIA)

comprises 30 people nominated by churches and regional ecumenical organisations to advise the WCC in international affairs. The staff of the WCC International Affairs, Peace and Human Security team - experienced professionals from around the world - engages with and supports churches and ecumenical bodies on these urgent priorities:

- peace-making and peaceful resolution of conflicts
- militarism, disarmament, and arms control
- human security and the root causes of terrorism
- human rights, religious liberty, and intolerance
- impunity, justice, and reconciliation
- international law and global governance

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)

supports Palestinians and Israelis working for peace by monitoring and reporting violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, offering protection by accompanying local communities in daily activities, and by advocating with churches for a peaceful end to the Occupation. The programme, which began in 2002, is coordinated by the World Council of Churches (WCC) within the Churches Commission on International Affairs (CCIA).

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- *Separated Families: A Report by Anna Seifert, Ecumenical Accompanier* (September-December 2004) www.quaker.org/eappi
- *The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel: Two Years of Nonviolent Witness and Active Presence for Peace*
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