

Freedom of Movement

GENERAL OVERVIEW

In the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), nearly every facet of life is controlled by Israeli military policies. These policies not only restrict movement, but also isolate and harass the civilian population.

- Freedom of movement is restricted by closures in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as regular curfews, roadblocks, checkpoints, electronic fences, and walls, in addition to other physical and administrative obstacles that affect the daily life of Palestinians.
- Routinely, Palestinians wait hours to pass through checkpoints in order to carry out daily activities like visiting family and friends, getting to work, school, or the hospital.

U.S. POLICY QUOTES

"The situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable. America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own."

-President Barack Obama | June 4, 2009 | Cairo Speech

U.S. policy supports efforts by the international community "to improve freedom of movement and access for Palestinians."

-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton | February 11, 2010 | Statement on the Middle East

SEPARATION BARRIER / WALL

Since June 2002, Israel has been building a wall inside the West Bank citing security reasons. However, because of its location and the impact this structure has on the Palestinian residents of the West Bank, the wall is a violation of international law and Palestinian human rights. The wall effectively confiscates a tenth of Palestinian land in the West Bank, destroys property and permanently alters the physical landscape of the occupied territories.

- In 2004, the International Court of Justice declared that "the construction of the wall being built by Israel...in the occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around Jerusalem...[is] contrary to international law. Israel is under obligation to dismantle forthwith the structure [and] make reparation for all damage caused..."¹
- Approximately 35,000 West Bank Palestinians are located between the wall and the Armistice Line, known as "no man's land." They must have permits to live in their homes and can only leave their communities via a gate in the wall.

The construction of the wall, through home demolition, land confiscation, the uprooting of crops, the isolation of communities and the separation of people from vital resources, obstructs the freedom of movement for Palestinians.

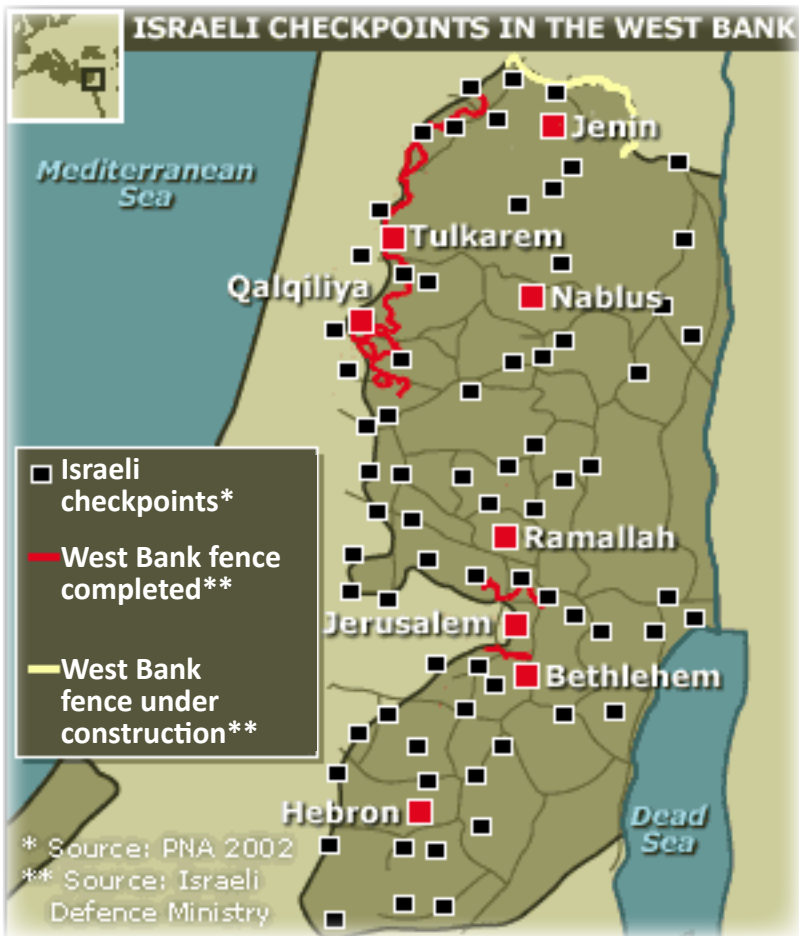


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CHECKPOINTS, ROADBLOCKS & BARRIERS

Checkpoints, roadblocks and other physical barriers are a reality of Palestinian life, especially in the West Bank. The vast majority of these obstacles are not on the border between Israel and the Palestinian territories but are scattered within the West Bank, isolating Palestinian communities from one another.

- The West Bank is a region approximately the size of the state of Delaware, the second smallest state in the U.S.
- 74% of the main routes in the West Bank are controlled by checkpoints or blocked entirely to Palestinian traffic.
- Most major highways in the West Bank are reserved for Israeli use only and are prohibited to Palestinians.
- Palestinians are required to obtain special permits from the Israeli military authorities to access the city of Jerusalem.
- Palestinian men aged 16-35 have often been prohibited from moving through the checkpoints or getting permits. This blanket prohibition implies that all young Palestinian men are a security threat, effectively imposing collective punishment on them.
- In 1993, "The Oslo Accord signed between the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel provided that the movement of people and vehicles will be free and normal and shall not need to be effected through checkpoints and roadblocks."³

OBSTACLES IN THE WEST BANK

As of May 2009 there were 699 physical obstacles to movement throughout the West Bank, including 93 staffed checkpoints and 541 unstaffed physical obstacles.²

FOCUS ON GAZA

Gaza is an area 25 miles long (4-7.5 miles wide) and is home to 1.5 million Palestinians, a third of whom are refugees. Gaza's borders with Israel and Egypt are controlled by those governments, while Israel controls Gaza's airspace and territorial waters. Since 2007, Israel has imposed an almost total blockade on the movement of people and goods in or out of Gaza.

- Since 1988, Israel has prevented Palestinians from traveling between Gaza and the West Bank.
- As of August 2009, 80% of Gaza residents lived in poverty and 60% were unemployed.
- In 2007, 18.5% of patients seeking emergency medical treatment outside of Gaza were refused permits to leave.
- In 1994, Israel built a wall around Gaza and designated a "buffer zone" inside it, which is inaccessible to Palestinians. This buffer zone includes at least 30% of the arable land in Gaza.⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. <http://www.icj-cij.org> accessed 4/8/10

2. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, occupied Palestinian territory. West Bank Movement and Access Update. May 2009. <http://www.ochaopt.org/>

3. The Humanitarian Impact of Israeli Infrastructure in the West Bank. Pg. 13

4. http://www.btselem.org/English/Gaza_Strip/ accessed 4/8/10

5. http://www.btselem.org/english/Freedom_of_Movement/Checkpoints_and_forbidden_Roads.asp accessed 4/8/10

6. <http://www.palestinemonitor.org/spip/spip.php?article8> accessed 4/8/10