

## The Occupation and Its Impact on the Health and Welfare of Palestinians.

The World Bank,<sup>1</sup> in its document titled, "The Economic Effects of Restricted Access to Land in the West Bank," 2008 describes with great and clear detail the present situation in which the Palestinian population finds itself in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.



Gordon, NH 2007

Beautiful Palestine (near Zababdeh)

According to the World Bank, in developing countries land is of fundamental importance to economic activity and development. It is often the most common means of storing wealth and a powerful economic asset. Land provides a foundation for economic activity in sectors as varied as agriculture, industries, housing, and tourism. It is also a key factor in the functioning of market (e.g. credit), and non-market institutions (e.g., local governments). In the West Bank land takes on a particular significance as economic activity has been stifled by the military occupation, and much of

the land area is inaccessible because of Israeli restrictions on movement of people and access to natural resources and because of land confiscation for Israeli settlement construction.

**Land Fragmentation.** The Wall/fence system erected by Israel throughout the West Bank drastically restricts the free movement of people and goods. The overall number of physical restrictions (physical obstacles such as checkpoints, roadblocks, gates, etc.) by 2007 had risen from 546 to 612. The Wall/fence system which forms an integral part of the physical barriers continues to be built, and the prevalent permit system continues to be enforced.<sup>1</sup>

**Choke Hold by Israeli Occupation and Colonization.** Israel has complete control of the borders of the West Bank and the sea and land borders of the Gaza strip. The southern border of the Gaza strip with Egypt is also closed. Colonies (settlements) for Jews only, a system of roads connecting the colonies with Israel on which Palestinians are denied access, all serve to disrupt Palestinian commerce and daily life. As the Palestinian population grows and its resource and development needs increase, this long-lasting situation has become an increasingly severe constraint to economic activity.<sup>1</sup> The construction permit system slows down or halts altogether most construction. Building permits are rare and difficult to obtain, with only a handful approved by the Israeli authorities annually for the past several years. In the meantime, unlicensed construction continues because of the needs of an expanding population despite a demolition rate that far outpaces building approvals by the Israeli authorities.<sup>1</sup>

**Scarcity of Land.** Overcrowding and land scarcity skew the pattern of urban development towards housing and away from economic activities and basic public infrastructure. Difficulties are compounded by the need to obtain permits from the Government of Israel to locate certain types of polluting infrastructure, such as sewage treatment or landfills away from the population. The denial of permits by the Israeli government leaves Palestinians at risk from health and safety hazards because of some industries having no recourse but to establish polluting or dangerous plants in towns. Finally in Palestinian towns, there is not enough land to provide open spaces for the people to enjoy some greenery.<sup>1</sup>

**Consequences of Poverty.** The economy continues to contract under the pressures of Israeli economic restrictions and political instability. In 2007 per capita GDP dipped to 60% of its levels in 1999, and investment dropped to precariously low levels. Poverty is on the increase.<sup>1</sup> Food security, as defined by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, consists of four

characteristics, all of which must be present. These are, first, the availability of sufficient quantities and qualities of food; second, the ability to access adequate food resources; third, the stable availability of these food resources; and fourth the opportunity to consume food through adequate diet, availability of clean water, adequate sanitation, and health care. According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, the Palestinian people living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are in serious trouble. Four of every ten consume too little food to lead a healthy and productive life, and another three face the threat of becoming food insecure. Only three out of ten are food secure.<sup>2</sup> Food security continues to the present day to be precarious in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. A 2007 food security analysis conducted by the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition concluded that 34% of the population of West Bank and the Gaza Strip was considered food secure in 2006, while 20% was marginally food secure, 12% was vulnerable to becoming food insecure and 34% was food insecure.<sup>3</sup> Economic conditions, particularly the loss of jobs, impacts directly on a population's food security, in particular when that population is already experiencing significant levels of food insecurity.

**Anemia.** A cross sectional study of physical and mental health of randomly selected pre-school children 6–59 months of age *in the occupied* Palestinian territory during the second Intifada demonstrated that an average of 37.9% of children were anemic (hemoglobin less than 11 mg/dl) and 9.0% had stunted growth. Rates of anemia were highest for the younger age groups at 56.7% for 6 to 11 months of age, 53.4% for 12 to 23 months of age, 37.7% for 24 to 35 months of age, 30.4% for 36 to 47 months of age, and 19.8% for those 45 to 59 months of age. Anemia rates were highest in the refugee camps, 41.9%, contrasted to city and village at 36.8% and 36.3%, respectively. The Gaza Strip had a higher anemia rate, 41.6%, than the West Bank, 35.5%.<sup>4</sup>

**Trauma.** Violence due to the Israel occupation permeates all parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. From September, 28 through October 31, 2003, more than 51,000 Palestinians were injured and 2,762 killed. Of children under the age of 18 years, 14,179 were injured and 701 were killed. Approximately 12% of the injured children suffered from a permanent disability. Most of the victims' injuries were in the upper part of their bodies, including their heads and eyes. Adolescents, aged 12-18 years, represent the majority of the affected young victimized population.<sup>5</sup>

**Mental Health.** Palestinian children suffer from various physical ailments because of their disadvantaged situation, including 10% who

suffer from moderate to severe malnutrition. In addition, because of violence from the Israeli occupation forces, children suffer from significant mental health disorders, including 33% with acute levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, 49% with moderate levels and 15.6% low levels. In "hot" areas, 55% of the children have acute levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, 35% moderate levels, and 9% low levels.<sup>5</sup>

**Stunting.** Using data from a survey conducted by the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics between November 2006 and January 2007, demographic and social determinants of growth of Palestinian children under the age of five years living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were analyzed.<sup>6</sup> Stunting rates in comparison with World Health Organization standards are highest north of Gaza City

Prevalence of traumatic experiences among a stratified random sample of 1000 children in community areas.<sup>5</sup>

Traumatic Event	%
<b>Direct personal experience</b>	
Shelling of the home	19.0%
Tear-gassed	36.1%
Severe burns	9.4%
Shot by live bullets	2.8%
Shot by plastic bullets	3.3%
Head injury, with loss of consciousness	2.4%
Deprivation of medical help	1.1%
<b>Witnessing traumatic events</b>	
Shooting, fighting, or explosion	83.2%
Stranger being injured or killed	66.9%
Friend or neighbor being injured or killed	61.6%
Family member being injured	25.3%
Funerals	94.6%

and are at a disturbing rate of 30.3%. By age group, stunting is highest, 16.9%, among children aged 12 to 24 months. Male children have a slightly higher rate of stunting, 11.2%, compared to 10.3% for female children. The rate for the entire Gaza Strip is 14.1% while it is lower for the West Bank at 8.0%.

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1. Source: Movement and Access Restrictions in the West Bank: Uncertainty and Inefficiency in the Palestinian Economy, May 9, 2007.  
<http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/22f431edb91c6f548525678a0051be1d/5fb13fcb4c7724ad852574eb0056beaa!OpenDocument>
2. Executive Report of the Food Security Assessment, West Bank and Gaza Strip. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations in collaboration with the World Food Programme, Rome, 2003
3. United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition, May 31, 2007
4. Halileh, S. and Gordon, N.H., Determinants of Anemia in Pre-School Children in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics* Vol. 52, No. 1, pp 12-19, 2005.
5. Qouta, S, PhD, and Odeh, J., MD, .] The Impact of Conflict on Children The Palestinian Experience, *Journal of Ambulatory Care Management*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 75-79, 2005.
6. Gordon NH, Halileh S. A study of the determinants of inadequate growth among Palestinian children under the age of five years. Ms in preparation.