



للإرشاد القانوني والاجتماعي

Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling

مرکز المرأة



WOMEN'S VOICES: Glimpses of Life Under Occupation

October 2012



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Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), is a Palestinian non-governmental organisation established in 1991 and based in Ramallah. WCLAC aims to address the causes and consequences of gender-based violence within the community as well as the gender-specific effects of prolonged military occupation.

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Table of Contents

- Introduction5
- Overview7
- Night Raids9
- Settler and Soldier Violence 17
- Soldiers Testify..... 25
- Property Destruction 31
- East Jerusalem..... 39
- The Gaza Strip 49
- Concluding Remarks 55
- Appendix 59



View east towards the Jordan Valley, photo by GhtH.

Introduction

This June marked 45 years since the start of Israel's military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. During this time, East Jerusalem has been annexed in violation of international law; half-a-million Israelis now live in illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; and at least 730,000 Palestinian men, women and children have been prosecuted in military courts and imprisoned.¹ However, as stark as these facts and figures may be, they do not describe the human cost of occupation on the ordinary lives of Palestinians, and particularly, on the lives of women.

This report seeks to illustrate some of the day-to-day challenges faced by Palestinians living under prolonged military occupation through the eyes of ordinary women who struggle, on a daily basis, to cope with an extraordinary situation. These are the stories that rarely make the headlines, but are nonetheless noteworthy because they are part-and-parcel of everyday life, and illustrate the practices and policies that have been implemented by the Israeli military and civilian authorities for nearly a half-century.

Also included in this report are two testimonies from Israeli soldiers from a new publication released by Breaking the Silence. The testimonies graphically illustrate the corrosive nature of Israel's military occupation on everybody who comes in contact with it.

This report is not intended to provide an in-depth analysis of the situation or seek to cover all issues affecting women living under occupation. Rather, the report relies on 14 testimonies collected from women in order to provide a brief glimpse into their lives and some of the challenges they face.

Some of the names of women in the report have been changed to protect their identities.

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1800-60-6030



Qalandia checkpoint, photo by WCLAC.

Overview

After six days of armed conflict in June 1967, the Israeli army occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip (Occupied Palestinian Territory). Regardless of the reasons for the war, international law is clear that territory can never be acquired as a result of aggression, even if exercised in self-defence. Accordingly, no sovereignty in the Occupied Palestinian Territory can legitimately pass to Israel, and no military occupation can be legally maintained indefinitely.² On the conclusion of the war, the Israeli authorities imposed military law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which still remains in force in the West Bank to this day, and affects approximately 2.5 million Palestinians. In reality this means that an Israeli military commander has full executive, legislative and judicial authority over millions of Palestinians who have no say as to how this power is exercised, contrary to basic democratic principles.

Further, the reality on the ground is that during the past 45 years, much of the Occupied Palestinian Territory has been subjected to a creeping annexation involving the construction of settlements, the transfer of 500,000 Israeli citizens into the West Bank and East Jerusalem, accompanied by a relentless grab for resources - all done in clear violation of international law.³ Although Israeli military law is applied to Palestinians in the West Bank, settlers living in the same location are subject to civilian law, giving rise to dual legal systems that discriminate based on origin or nationality.⁴

The inevitable consequence of these actions has produced tension, poverty, despair, mass detention and displacement. Through the eyes of women, this report highlights just a few ways in which ordinary people are directly affected by this process of *de facto* annexation and dispossession. The report highlights the use of frequent night raids on villages who dare to protest against the loss of their land, and how these same villages are subjected to settler attacks which the Israeli army does little to prevent. The report also looks at the systematic destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, such as water wells and agricultural buildings, and the difficulty in obtaining building permits in East Jerusalem if the applicant is Palestinian. Finally, the report touches upon the hardship of life in Gaza, which has been subjected to a blockade since 2007, and highlights how simple activities such as studying at night, has become so difficult.

Through the eyes of women, this report seeks to provide glimpses of the human cost that prolonged military occupation exacts on ordinary people.



Night Raids



Photo by GhtH.

"We believe that repeated night raids like the one on my house are intended to intimidate and frighten us and to force us to give up the weekly protests against the nearby settlement."

Manal T.

such as computers and documents in what appears to be an attempt to harass and intimidate the residents into submission.

Most night-time operations conducted by the military occur at friction points in the West Bank, usually at locations where an Israeli settlement has been built close to a Palestinian village. In many cases these settlements are wholly or partially built on land owned by the village, and their presence naturally causes tension. Other friction points include roads used by the Israeli army and settlers that pass close to Palestinian villages, as well as army checkpoints and the Wall.

"There were maybe 20 soldiers. They broke into the house and asked us all to gather in the living room. My 19-year-old daughter was shivering from fear, she just could not control herself. I think it was about 2:00 a.m. and we had to wake up my elderly in-laws who live next door. They are old and sick but the soldiers forced us to drag them out of bed."

I.M.

The Israeli army has been conducting night-time operations in Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank for the past 45 years. One of the most common reasons for the military to enter a Palestinian village or town at night is to conduct search and arrest operations. However, in recent times the military has also been entering houses in villages where weekly protests occur, waking up entire families, photographing children for future identification and taking away items

The tensions that arise at these friction points can manifest themselves in a number of different ways, including: weekly demonstrations; stone throwing and other forms of violence; army incursions; night raids; and arrests. In recent years, an increasing number of Palestinian villages began protesting the settlements, the illegal Wall built on their land and the prolonged military occupation.⁵ Typically, these demonstrations are suppressed by the military using tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannon containing a foul smelling liquid ("skunk water") and on occasion live ammunition. These confrontations frequently result in arrests, injuries and in some cases, fatalities. In order to maintain military control over the territory and curtail freedom of expression in the West Bank, the Israeli army continues to rely on a



Woman treated in An Nabi Saleh, photo by Oren Ziv/Activestills.

1967 military order that effectively prohibits Palestinian demonstrations and free speech. The order stipulates that a “political” gathering of 10 or more persons requires a permit from the military. The penalty for a breach of the order is 10 years imprisonment or a heavy fine.⁶

Women who live at these friction points and who have experienced night-time raids speak of their fear and the unsettling effect on their families, and in particular, on their children. WCLAC has also documented cases which indicate there is no legitimate security reason for some of these raids, but are conducted as a form of collective punishment in an attempt to force a village to stop protesting.

Case Study 1

Name:	Bushra T.
Age:	39
Location:	An Nabi Saleh, West Bank
Date of incident:	20 March 2012
Nature of incident:	Night raid

On 20 March 2012, the home of a 39-year-old mother from the village of An Nabi Saleh, in the occupied West Bank, is raided by Israeli soldiers after midnight and documents, including title deeds, are forcibly removed.

The village of An Nabi Saleh is located 15 kilometres north of Ramallah and has a population of 500 residents. In 1977 the Israeli settlement of Halamish was established about 500 metres away, partly on village lands. In 2009, the settlement expanded still further taking over a spring belonging to one of the villagers. This was the spark for weekly Friday demonstrations by the residents of the village against the settlement. The response from the Israeli army has been to conduct frequent night time raids, which create a sense of fear and insecurity in the village.

“I was still awake when I heard the sound of cars pulling up in front of our house just after midnight,” recalls Bushra. “I then heard loud banging at our front door. Anan, my 16-year-old son was awake too. He rushed into my bedroom to tell me soldiers had surrounded our house. I immediately assumed they had come to arrest him as they have done twice before. I was scared and worried that they might beat him up as they did before. I woke my husband and told him soldiers were around the house. We all went downstairs and my husband opened the door. About 15 soldiers rushed in and immediately started to search the house. They spread out into each and every room and did not tell us what they were looking for. The Commander then told my husband to tell us to gather in the living room. My husband told him our two young daughters were asleep but he told him to wake them up and bring them downstairs. I quickly rushed upstairs to get the girls. I didn’t want the same thing to happen as last time when our house was raided and the girls woke up to find army dogs in their bedroom. It was a terrifying experience for them,” says Bushra.

“Soldiers then took apart the computer and took out the hard drive and placed it on the table. We didn’t know what was going on and my husband kept asking them questions but they did not answer. They also put the laptop aside and some magazines,” recalls Bushra. “My husband became



Bushra T. and her son Anan, photo by WCLAC.

very upset and insisted on knowing why they were placing all these items on the table, but they did not pay any attention to him. Soldiers then went upstairs and searched the wardrobes. They found a bag with all our official documents which included land ownership deeds, birth certificates and other important documents. They took the stack of papers together with the laptop and hard drive and left. When my husband realised they were leaving with these official documents he followed them outside asking them to give us some kind of a proof that they had left with all these items but they ignored his request. The soldiers left our house about half-an-hour later and went to our neighbor's house where we later found out that they did the same thing to them," says Bushra.

"I did not really care about them taking the computer but I am worried about the official documents especially the land ownership deeds. We own a large piece of land where our house is built, on the hill opposite the nearby settlement of Halamish. I worry that they might confiscate the land or even forge a sale without our consent."

"This is not the first time that soldiers came to the house in the middle of the night, but this is the first time they have taken things with them. I don't feel my house is a safe place anymore. When night falls my heart sinks and

I find it hard to fall asleep; I find myself distracted by the slightest sound outside. My biggest worry is my children and their safety. My son Anan stays up late because he expects soldiers to come for him any time and he wants to be awake when they do. Life in the village these days is very stressful.”

Case study 2

Name:	Dalal S.
Age:	44
Location:	Haris village, West Bank
Date of incident:	28 February 2012
Nature of incident:	Night raid / soldier violence / detention / prison visits

On 28 February 2012, the home of a 44-year-old woman from the village of Haris, in the occupied West Bank, is raided at 2:00 am by Israeli soldiers, and her 19-year-old son is taken away.

Dalal lives with her husband and five children in Haris village, in the north of the West Bank. The Israeli settlement of Ari’el is located nearby, partly on land belonging to the village.

“On 28 February 2012, at around 2:00 am, I woke up to the sound of loud banging at the front gate,” recalls Dalal. “Somebody was shouting in Arabic telling us to open the gate. It was a cold rainy night. My husband ran out to open the gate, and when he opened it, Israeli soldiers rushed in and entered the house. They were terrifying and my three-year-old daughter cried when she saw them inside the house.”

At first the soldiers refused to allow Dalal’s husband back in the house and forced him to wait outside in the rain. The soldiers began to search the house without telling the family what they were looking for. “They made a huge mess with their muddy boots and didn’t make any effort to be respectful,” says Dalal. One of the soldiers then asked for Dalal’s 19-year-old son, Imad. “My husband pointed to Imad and asked the soldiers what they wanted from him, but his question was ignored,” recalls Dalal. Imad was then blindfolded and his hands were tied. “One of the soldiers then kicked him and pushed him into a room, while another soldier led me and the other children to another room.”



Dalal S., photo by WCLAC.

A few minutes later Imad was taken out of the house. “He was not dressed properly and didn’t have his shoes on,” recalls Dalal. “My husband asked whether they would allow him to put on some warm clothes but they refused. Imad asked to be allowed to go to the bathroom. At first the soldiers refused but then they allowed him to go and one of the soldiers entered the bathroom with him. Then they took him away. All this happened so quickly, they snatched him away in front of my eyes. I did not sleep that night. I felt helpless and scared. Our neighbours told us the following day that as soon as the soldiers left the house with Imad they started to beat him very hard. They hit him with the butts of their guns all the way to the vehicle which was about 100 meters away. The neighbours also told me that Imad passed out when he was kicked in the head. I nearly passed out myself when I heard this,” says Dalal.

The next morning Dalal’s husband called a human rights organisation to find out why their son had been arrested and where he was being

held. They also wanted to know if Imad was alright after being told by their neighbours that he had been beaten. Dalal's husband gave the organisation their son's I.D. number and they called back 15 minutes later to say Imad had been taken to a hospital near Petah Tikva, inside Israel. "My husband immediately called the hospital for more details about Imad's health but the hospital refused to give him any details," recalls Dalal. The family was later informed that Imad was taken to Huwwara interrogation centre, near Nablus, in the West Bank, after being released from hospital.

"I haven't been sleeping well since he was arrested. I worry all the time that soldiers might beat him up again. He is now in Megiddo prison inside Israel. I applied for a permit to visit him but it took two months before the permit was issued. On 30 May I saw him for the first time. I went with my younger son to visit him. We left the house at 6:00 am and didn't get back until 7:00 pm. The trip was exhausting and humiliating. The minute I saw Imad I started to cry, I couldn't hold back my tears. He seemed in good health but I could feel he was very sad. The visit lasted for half-an-hour and I cried the whole time. When he saw how emotional I was he asked me not to visit him again. I think he was emotional too and didn't know what else to say. At the end of the visit he waved his hand good bye but did not look me in the eye, he couldn't."

"When I got back home I was exhausted. I still cry a lot and I am unable to go about my daily routine as usual," says Dalal. "I feel my hands are tied; I am unable to do my house work. I don't have the energy I used to have. I just wish he gets out of jail as soon as possible. I worry that they will keep coming back for him. This will destroy his future," says Dalal.

Settler and Soldier Violence



Photo by Sylvie Le Clezio.

“The soldiers then forced me to stand up by pulling my hair while the other soldiers pushed me over the thorn and stones. My shoes fell off my feet and I begged them to let me put my shoes on but they refused.”

Alia A.

At the time of writing, there are approximately 500,000 Israeli settlers living in settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. International law is clear that all settlements are illegal and under the Fourth Geneva Convention Israel is not permitted to allow its civilians to live in these areas. This lack of respect for the rule of law serves only to fuel frustrations and a sense of despair.

The settlements are encouraged by the Israeli government and protected by the army.

In order to maintain the settlement project, the army has established a network of checkpoints throughout the West Bank and frequently enters Palestinian villages to break up protests and to conduct arrest operations. This open ended military presence is a major cause of tension and source of violence.

Most Israeli settlements are constructed close to Palestinian towns and villages. Not only is this construction illegal, but it also poses an enormous provocation to the local Palestinian population and raises tensions between the two communities. According to the UN, the root cause of settler violence “is Israel’s decades-long policy of illegally facilitating the settling of its citizens inside occupied Palestinian territory. This activity has resulted in the progressive takeover of Palestinian land, resources and transportation routes and has created two separate systems of rights and privileges, favoring Israeli citizens at the expense of the over 2.5 million Palestinian residents of the West Bank. Recent official efforts to retroactively legalize settler takeover of privately-owned Palestinian land actively promotes a culture of impunity that contributes to continued violence.”⁷

Or in the words of the Israeli organisation, Yesh Din: “[A]cts of violence are being committed by Israeli civilians against Palestinians in the West Bank on a daily basis, manifesting in many forms of attacks against people and destruction of their property. These acts of violence are not isolated incidents, nor are they simply acts of hate or anger. Rather this brand of violence is part of a sophisticated, wider strategy designed to assert territorial domination over Palestinians in the West Bank.”⁸



Woman arrested during demonstration in An Nabi Saleh, photo by Anne Paq/Activestills.

According to the UN, in 2011 the number of settler attacks resulting in Palestinian casualties and property damage increased by 32 percent, and by 144 percent since 2009.⁹ According to the same source, 10,000 Palestinian-owned trees (mostly olive trees) were damaged or destroyed by Israeli settlers in 2011, undermining the livelihoods of hundreds of families.¹⁰ Also in 2011, 139 Palestinians were displaced due to settler attacks, many forced to leave their homes for good.

In recent years, some acts of violence by settlers against Palestinians have been perpetrated under the “price tag” slogan.¹¹ Essentially, these are acts of violence by settlers against Palestinians or the Israeli army in response to any act that is perceived to be damaging to the settlement enterprise. These acts of violence include firebombing mosques and cars, destroying crops and painting graffiti on buildings and vehicles.¹²

With a lack of accountability for acts of violence by settlers against Palestinians, there is little reason to expect the situation to get anything other than worse. The Israeli authorities repeatedly fail to enforce the rule of law in response to settlers’ acts of violence against Palestinians.

“My house is closest to the settlement of Yitzhar where radical settlers often launch attacks against us. The last time they launched an attack was in December 2011 when a large group surrounded our house in the middle of the night and threw rocks at our windows. It was such a frightening experience that I felt sick for days.”

Khadra M.

Israeli soldiers often fail to stop attacks and investigations are inadequate or poorly conducted. Measures such as requiring Palestinians to file complaints at police stations located inside Israeli settlements also discourage the filing of complaints.¹³

According to Yesh Din over 90 percent of complaints regarding settler violence filed by Palestinians with the Israeli police are closed without indictment, and in more than 84 percent of cases, investigations are closed in circumstances that indicate procedural failure.¹⁴ In cases of complaints against the army, the situation is no better. According to Yesh Din: “The chances of a criminal offense

carried out by an IDF soldier against a Palestinian successfully navigating the obstacle course of the complaint procedure [...] are almost nil.”¹⁵ This lack of accountability was also referred to by the US State Department in its Human Rights Report for 2011.¹⁶ Further, this situation is taking place against a backdrop in which the Israeli government is actively encouraging more settlers to move into the West Bank and East Jerusalem.¹⁷

Finally, in September 2012, the EU issued a statement condemning continuing settler violence and the deliberate provocation of Palestinian civilians. The statement expressed particular concern about the increasing number and the severity of recent attacks by “extremist settlers”. The statement concluded by confirming that settlement activity is illegal under international law and threatens to make a two-state solution impossible.¹⁸ The EU statement followed the release of a report by the US State Department in which violence by settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank were described in some cases as “terrorist incidents”.¹⁹

Case Study 3

Name:	Khadra M.
Age:	43
Location:	'Asira Al-Qibliya, West Bank
Date of incident:	19 May 2012
Nature of incident:	Settler violence

On 19 May 2012, Israeli settlers from the settlement of Yitzhar attack the village of 'Asira Al-Qibliya, in the occupied West Bank and shoot a Palestinian resident.

"I was at home doing some house work on Saturday, when I heard some whistling outside at around 4:45 pm," recalls Khadra. "I looked out the window and saw settlers wearing white shirts coming down the hill towards the village. My house is closest to the settlement of Yitzhar where radical settlers often launch attacks against us. The last time they launched an attack was in December when a large group surrounded our house in the middle of the night and threw rocks at our windows. It was such a frightening experience that I felt sick for days," says Khadra.

Khadra went up to the roof of her house and started filming with a video camera given to her by the Israeli human rights organisation, B'Tselem. "When the settlers were about 40 metres away from our house men from the village started to walk in their direction to stop them approaching any further. I immediately knew there was going to be a confrontation and hoped the soldiers would show up soon," recalls Khadra.

"More and more settlers came down the hill and more and more men from the village went out to confront them. Both the settlers and the men threw stones at each other. Some were carrying sticks. It took the soldiers a long time to show up but when they finally did, they didn't do much. I saw a settler with a pistol aiming it at the men in the village as if he was about to shoot. I was so scared," recalls Khadra. "I heard gun shots. I also saw two other settlers aiming their assault rifles at the men throwing stones. There were more gunshots. Seconds later I realised a young man had been shot in the head."

"This dreadful situation went on for nearly two hours and during this whole time the soldiers did almost nothing," recalls Khadra. "Then they shot tear gas and everybody started to clear the area. The situation was very



Khadra M. and her daughter Ruba, photo by WCLAC.

tense until about 7:00 pm. I could not sleep that night," says Khadra. "No matter how much I tell myself I should not be afraid I cannot help it. Deep in my heart I was sure the situation would change the minute the soldiers came, but I should have known better. It is a disturbing feeling to know we are completely on our own; nobody is there to help or protect us."

Case study 4

Name:	Alia A.
Age:	15
Location:	Suseya village, West Bank
Date of incident:	15 March 2012
Nature of incident:	Soldier violence

On 15 March 2012, a 15-year-old girl from Suseya village, in the occupied West Bank, reports being beaten by Israeli soldiers as she tries to herd the family's goats.

Fifteen-year-old Alia lives in the village of Suseya, in the hills south of the West Bank city of Hebron. On 15 March she recalls that her brother went to herd the family's goats while she stayed home. "At around 5:00 p.m. I saw an army vehicle stop on the hill where my brother was," recalls Alia. "About 10 minutes later five soldiers stepped out of the vehicle and walked towards my brother. They were carrying guns. I was worried about my brother and ran out to be with him in case he needed help. I also alerted other villagers."

"My brother was so scared when he saw the soldiers walking towards him that he ran away and left the goats on their own," recalls Alia. "When I arrived I picked up a stone and tried to herd the goats which were hiding in the vines and under the olive trees. I wanted to take them home before the soldiers confiscated them. All of a sudden, one of the soldiers ran behind me and ordered me to stop. He also said something in Hebrew that I could not understand. He chased me for about five minutes until he caught up with me, grabbed my shirt and pulled me down. I fell down with my face to the ground. The soldier then tied my hands behind my back with plastic ties. I was shouting and screaming and felt very scared. I asked the soldier 'what have I done? Why are you doing this to me?' But the soldier did not answer me and kicked me many times in my back with his boots. I was in severe pain."

Shortly afterwards Alia's mother arrived on the scene and asked the soldiers to stop beating her daughter. "When she approached me to try to rescue me from the soldier the other soldiers prevented her from getting closer. One of the soldiers then beat my mother on her leg with the back of his gun," says Alia. "My mother screamed out in pain and



Alia A., photo by WCLAC.

called the name of one of our relatives who works for B'tselem and has a video camera. She wanted him to document the incident."

"The soldier then forced me to stand up by pulling my hair while the other soldiers pushed me over thorns and stones," recalls Alia. "My shoes fell off my feet and I begged them to let me put my shoes on but they refused. They pushed me to where the army vehicle was parked. I saw that they had also dragged my brother, Hamza, and had tied his hands behind his back. They asked both of us to sit by the jeep. When our relative arrived with the camera the soldiers beat him up, tied his hands behind his back with a plastic tie and took his camera away."

Shortly afterwards an Israeli police car arrived. After some argument between the soldiers and the policemen the soldiers released Alia and her brother, but arrested the relative with the camera.

"This was a terrible incident; I was shaken for a long time. For a whole week I could not walk because the thorns had caused injuries to my feet. I also woke up in the middle of the night terrified; I kept dreaming that a soldier was beating me up. For months I felt pain in my wrists because the plastic ties were so tight. The ties left a blue mark on my wrist and caused them to swell. I am very scared of soldiers, I panic when I see them even from a distance. I still have bruises on my body even months after the incident," says Alia.

Soldiers Testify

**BREAKING
THE SILENCE**

In August 2012, *Breaking the Silence*, an Israeli organisation made up of ex-Israeli soldiers, released a book of testimonies in which soldiers speak about their service in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The focus of the book is on the treatment of children, but it also confirms many of the statements collected by WCLAC from women who speak about the fear they experience every time the Israeli army enters their village. This book provides strong corroborative evidence of the brutal reality of day-to-day life under military occupation.²⁰

According to *Breaking the Silence's* website: "Cases of abuse towards Palestinians, looting and destruction of property have been the norm for years, but are still explained as extreme and unique cases. Our testimonies portray a different and much grimmer picture in which deterioration of moral standards finds expression in the character of orders and the rules of engagement, and are justified in the name of Israel's security. While this reality is known to Israeli soldiers and commanders, Israeli society continues to turn a blind eye, and to deny what is done in its name. Discharged soldiers returning to civilian life discover the gap between the reality they encountered in the Territories, and the silence about this reality they encounter at home. In order to become civilians again, soldiers are forced to ignore what they have seen and done."

The introduction to *Breaking the Silence's* new report states that: "[T]he dozens of testimonies contained in this booklet reveal the perspective of the Israeli soldiers on the ground, messengers of Israeli society, and serve as witness to the ongoing slide of the military system toward increasing immorality. The words of the soldiers included here constitute an urgent call to Israeli society and its leaders: We must foster a serious discourse regarding the price of military rule of the Occupied Territories, the factors that enable this reality, and their drastic effect on the future of the region."

The following testimonies are reproduced here with the kind permission of *Breaking the Silence*.

Title:	"Arrest of a 15 year old"
Unit:	50th Battalion, Nahal Brigade
Date:	April 2011

A soldier describes the arrest of a 15-year-old boy and the effect on his mother:

"Towards the end of our service, a guy from my company took a video camera and filmed the company. What you usually find in these films is footage of the guys, sitting around, goofing off, singing songs, etc ... like a field trip. But he took the camera along ... on arrests, patrols, and patrols on jeeps. He had many hours on tape."

"At one point, I got hold of the material. One of the tapes was of an arrest I took part in. It was a rainy day ... We were very professional, with the camera there, people paid more attention to how they were doing things, they were like a commando unit. It was a routine arrest. Nothing special happened and he didn't film anything special. We went to a village ... We surrounded the house from all sides ... Everyone reported, you could hear it in the video, that he's in position and ready. A squad arrived with their commander and radioman and another soldier. They banged on the door ... and walked into the house aggressively ... They walk into the house, they don't say who they're looking for. Everyone's pressed against the wall in one room and he started searching. Everything is being filmed."

"I wasn't in the room at the time, I was watching from the outside, they were filming inside the house. We see him going in and out of the rooms holding the camera and filming. He's very forceful, aggressive. Which is what you're supposed to do if you want to arrest someone. That's how you make an arrest. They take a 15-year-old boy out of the house. That was the detainee. A 15-year-old boy. I have no idea what he had done. A 15-year-old can drive a car bomb if he can reach the pedals or hand out Hamas flyers. We don't know why they arrested him, we just arrested him. And then his mother comes out ... it's raining, he's barefoot. They lead him in the mud to the place we started out to get him in the truck that would take him to the General Security Services, who knows what would happen to him there. His mother is standing in the doorway watching them take him away and she starts screaming hysterically. Hysterically. Everything is on film. We returned that day with him and someone else who was arrested. We went on as usual."

"The months passed ... About a year later I watch the film again and go back in time. I show the film to my family. I put it on the computer, I show them where everyone is and I start talking about technical things: 'Here we're walking into the house. We're searching the rooms to see if anyone's inside ... And I forget, or I wasn't conscious, I think that was the problem. I wasn't conscious of the human side of this incident. I didn't even remember that they took the mother's son away. And ... When you're no longer a soldier and you're in a different situation, you suddenly notice it. And then I said ... to myself: 'Wow, did I do that?' Now when I look at the people around me, my sister is watching this. If someone took my sister like that? I'd freak out. Or if someone took me, my mother would ... pass out in a minute. Suddenly you realize. Suddenly you realize what we did. Those were our orders. It's not that we were super-cruel. Those were our orders. You don't think about these things. You become impervious. On all levels, as a soldier, as a commander. Nothing. If we have to take a 15-year-old, we'll take a 15-year-old. If it's a 9-year-old, we'll take a 9-year-old. Without giving it much thought."

"And suddenly ... When I think about it, it's the first time you put yourself in the place of the person standing on the other side of your rifle ... Suddenly I started to imagine it and realized that it's me ... I couldn't contain myself, I went to the bathroom and started crying ... I was ashamed. I was also ashamed to cry ... because it's embarrassing. Nobody understood where it was coming from. I was explaining technical things and suddenly ... I didn't know how to swallow it, and neither did anyone else. They knocked on the door and asked me if I was all right. My sister asked if I'm OK, if I needed something ... You wonder how you'll tell your son, you know?"

Title:	"Can't tell right from wrong"
Unit:	Kfir Brigade
Rank:	First Sergeant
Location:	Hebron, occupied West Bank
Date:	2006-2007

A soldier describes the arrest of a 15-year-old boy and his subsequent beating by the soldier's commanding officer in front of the child's mother.

"Kids would throw stones at us, we'd catch some kid who happened to be there and beat him to a pulp. Even if he didn't throw stones. He would know who did. 'Who is it? Who is it?' Finally he'd tell us who did it. Once we were on patrol, someone threw stones at us, nothing really serious, so we caught some Palestinian kid who had been nearby, we knew he'd seen this, he knew who had thrown stones. Let's say we hit him, to put it mildly, until he told us. [...] He told us where the kid was, we wouldn't leave him alone until he told us exactly where the kid lived. We went to that person's home [...] He was about 15 years old."

"We went to his house. He hadn't been home the night before. So we came in the morning, knocked on the door, some old woman came out, around 60 or so. She says: 'There's no one here.' You know how it is. We said we didn't care, went in, me and another guy, and at this point you have no more patience for Hebron and Arabs and Jews there. We entered, began to trash the place. There are doors on both sides of the corridor, I open all the doors on one side, my friend on the other side. We found the boy behind the last door on the left. He was totally scared, realized we'd caught him. At first he wanted to escape, then he saw my comrade standing at the door, and gave up. We took him out."

"We had a commander, never mind his name, who was a bit on edge. He beat the boy to a pulp, really knocked him around. [...] These were the little things. And then it becomes a kind of habit. Patrols with beatings happened on a daily basis. We were really going at it. [...] He grabbed him, took him out, and the people saw him, the parents saw him. [...] His nose was bleeding. He had really been beaten to a pulp. The commander said to his mother: 'Keep away!' Came close, cocked his gun, he already had a bullet in the barrel, or halfway so it wouldn't just fly out. She got scared. He actually stuck the gun-barrel in the kid's mouth. Literally. [...] 'Anyone gets close, I kill him. Don't annoy me. I'll kill him. I have no mercy.' He was really on the edge."

“Things got to a point where you can no longer tell good from bad. That’s how it was in our platoon. We thought they were all shits. Anyway, the commander gripped the kid, stuck his gun in his mouth, yelled and all, and the kid was hardly able to walk. We dragged him further, and then he said again: ‘One more time this kid lifts a stone, anything, I kill him. No mercy.’

Interviewer: If I were a Palestinian, what would I get beaten up for?

“It was enough for you to give us a look that we didn’t like, straight in the eye, and you’d be hit on the spot. We got to such a state and were so sick of being there, you know what I mean.”

Property Destruction



Photo by EAPPI.

"At around 10:30 a.m., five army jeeps and two bulldozers arrived at the scene and started to demolish the agricultural shed and water well. [...] I feel sad and defeated. We depend on our land for income and without the well and the shed we cannot take care of the land. My younger son who is eight cried when he found out the shed was demolished. I don't think he knows exactly what happened but he could feel the stress and the tension at home."

Fatmeh H.

Palestinian property is frequently damaged or destroyed by settlers and the Israeli military and civilian authorities throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The types of property destroyed include homes, schools, agricultural land and water cisterns.²¹ In 60 percent of the West Bank (Area C), Palestinians are required to apply to the Israeli military authorities for all types of building permits which are difficult to obtain, leading to "unauthorised" construction.

The military authorities place many bureaucratic obstacles in the way of Palestinians seeking residential or other building permits. These obstacles have been described by one UN agency as follows: "since the onset of its occupation in 1967, the Government of Israel has implemented a range of measures that restrict Palestinians' use of land and resources in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). One of the primary

ways Israel has done this has been through the application of restrictive planning and zoning regimes to Palestinian communities. [...] In practice, the Israeli authorities generally allow Palestinian construction only within the boundaries of an Israeli-approved plan and these cover less than one percent of Area C, much of which is already built on. [...] As a result of this restrictive planning regime, tens of thousands of Palestinians wishing to build in most parts of Area C are left with no choice other than to carry out un-authorized construction on their land to meet their housing needs and risk demolition of their structures and subsequent displacement."²² According to UN figures, in the first six months of 2012, 383 Palestinian structures were demolished by Israeli authorities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, of which 120 were residences, displacing 615 people.²³

In recent years, the Israeli military authorities have also been systematically targeting Palestinian water cisterns in Area C for demolition. These cisterns are vital to the livelihoods of thousands of Palestinians living



Family sitting on the rubble of their home in Silwan, East Jerusalem, photo by Keren Manor/Activestills.

in the area who rely on them to provide water for livestock, crops and domestic water consumption. Between 2009 and July 2011, 44 Palestinian water cisterns were destroyed by the Israeli authorities in Area C for being built without permits. It is important to note that these “administrative demolitions” carried out in accordance with Israeli military regulations, violate international law which prohibits the destruction of property considered essential for the survival of the civilian population.²⁴ The human cost of these “administrative demolitions” is that since 2009, at least 13,602 Palestinians have been adversely affected resulting in 127 displacements.²⁵



Photo by GhtH.

Case Study 5

Name:	Fawziyeh A.
Age:	54
Location:	Kafr ed Dik village, West Bank
Date of incident:	21 November 2011
Nature of incident:	Destruction of water well and agricultural building

On 21 November 2011, Israeli bulldozers destroy agricultural sheds and water wells belonging to Palestinian farmers near the village of Kafr ed Dik, in the occupied West Bank.

Fawziyeh lives in the small village of Kafr ed Dik, in the West Bank. The Israeli settlement of Ale Zahav is located nearby. "On 11 October 2011, Israeli soldiers placed a notice in front of the agricultural shed which we built more than 10 years ago ordering us not to add to the structure," recalls Fawziyeh. "The shed is made out of bricks and has a tin roof. It has a bathroom, a kitchen and some furniture and mattresses for us to sleep on. I helped build the shed with my own hands together with my son. I worked very hard to make it a nice place for the family to use during the olive harvest season. Ten years ago we also built a well to collect rain water. This enabled us to grow peas and beans on the land around the shed. We sold some of the crop and kept some for ourselves."

"On 21 November 2011, at around 11:00 a.m., two Israeli bulldozers, five army jeeps and a vehicle from the planning authorities arrived at the place where the shed was build," recalls Fawziyeh. "A farmer who was nearby later told me. I was at my sister's house at the time when I heard the loudspeaker from the mosque telling the farmers who owned sheds and water wells to go to their land because soldiers were about to demolish them."

"I lost my mind when I heard this and rushed to the place with my sister," says Fawziyeh. "When I arrived I saw soldiers surrounding all the other farmers who had arrived at the scene preventing them from approaching their land and obstructing the bulldozers. I also saw some journalists and a T.V. crew."

"One of the soldiers stopped me and asked where I was going. I told him I wanted to go to my shed but he prevented me. I sat on the ground because I could not hold myself any longer. I was tired from the long fast

walk to the land but when the soldier prevented me from getting to the shed I found it hard to breathe and just collapsed. I suffer from diabetes and high blood pressure, I felt I was about to die,” recalls Fawziyeh.

“I collected all my strength and asked one of the soldiers why they were demolishing the shed. I explained to him that we use the shed to store agricultural tools and to keep olives during the harvest. I told him the shed does no harm to anyone, it is way out in the fields. The soldier told me that it was not legal. I was so furious and asked him whether the settlement built on our land was legal,” says Fawziyeh.

Case Study 6

Name:	Amani S.
Age:	30
Location:	Old City, Jerusalem
Date of incident:	Continuing
Nature of incident:	House demolition

A mother of five from occupied East Jerusalem describes how her husband was forced to demolish their own home which was built without an Israeli permit.²⁶

Thirty-year-old Amani lives in the old city of Jerusalem. She is married with five young children. “When I married nearly 13 years ago I lived in a small room in the basement of the house of my husband’s family; my husband and I could not afford to rent our own house. We lived in this room for nearly three years. We had no privacy and there wasn’t enough space for the children,” recalls Amani.

“My husband and I thought of fixing the space on the top floor of the family house which was neglected and used as a storage area. The advantage was that it was bigger than the basement. My husband fixed the walls, built a bathroom and a small kitchenette. We moved in and lived there until 2001. Again, the place was not big enough as our family grew. My husband decided to add another room. He did not apply for a permit because we all know that the municipality will not issue a building permit



Old City / East Jerusalem, photo by GhtH.

for Palestinian residents of the old city. My husband built the room using cheap materials and not concrete. A month after he finished the room we received a notice from the Jerusalem municipality and a 14,000 shekel fine (nearly \$3,500). We were very sad, we cannot afford this amount of money and at the same time there was no choice for us, we needed to expand to have the extra space," says Amani.

"My husband appointed a lawyer who managed to have us pay the fine in installments, 500 shekels a month (\$125), which put us under a lot of financial stress. At the same time we tried to obtain the necessary permit but the authorities rejected our application as we expected. The case took a long time in the court; the sessions kept being adjourned sometimes for six, seven, even eight months."

"Finally in 2011, the court issued a demolition order for the extra room. The court also ruled that if we did not demolish the room ourselves my husband would be put in prison for three months and we would have to pay the costs of the demolition which they estimated to be about 70,000 shekels (about \$18,000). My husband had no choice but to demolish the

room with his own hands. The court gave us a two-month notice after which they would bring bulldozers and demolish the room at our own expense," recalls Amani.

"On 20 July 2012, my husband demolished the room. I cannot describe my feelings when I saw him bring down the walls with a sledgehammer. It was the saddest day of my life. I was worried about my children and how this might impact them. I know they are young but I am sure watching their father demolish the room is something they will never forget."

"When my husband demolished the room the electricity was disconnected and the water pipes were destroyed. We extended a cable from the house of my brother-in-law and we still don't have cold water.

My life is destroyed. Our financial situation was not very good to begin with and the extra expenses we had to pay because of this room brought us close to the red line. My husband does not have a regular stable job, he works as a day worker and he stays home when there is no work available. Our average income is about \$1,000 a month. This is not enough to buy basic food for the children. There is no way we can afford to rent a bigger house," says Amani.

"Life in Jerusalem is not easy for Palestinian families. The authorities keep an eye on us and make sure they take every opportunity to force us out. Every day is a struggle. The future for my family, of my young children and me is unknown. I cannot live anywhere else because if I move out I risk losing my residency rights in the city and my children will lose their rights too."

East Jerusalem



Photo by GhtH.

“Palestinians are utterly frustrated by the impact of Israeli policies on their lives. They can’t move freely around their territory. They can’t plan their communities. They are evicted from their homes. Their homes are regularly demolished. I don’t believe that most people in Israel have any idea of the way planning policies are used to divide and harass communities and families. They would not themselves like to be subjected to such behavior.”

UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs,
Baroness Valerie Amos, May 2011.

Since 1967, successive Israeli governments have taken a number of measures aimed at annexing East Jerusalem, including applying Israeli law to the east of the city. In response to these unilateral actions, the UN Security Council has on a number of occasions recalled “the principle that acquisition of territory by military conquest is inadmissible” and confirmed that “all legislative and administrative actions taken by Israel to change the status of the City of Jerusalem, including expropriation of land and properties, transfer of populations and legislation aimed at the incorporation of the occupied section, are totally invalid and cannot change that status.”²⁷

In spite of the legal position, successive Israeli governments have sought to cement Israel’s control over East Jerusalem by facilitating the influx of nearly 200,000 Israeli settlers into the area, including about 2,000 settlers into the centre of Palestinian neighbourhoods.²⁸ The establishment of settlements in the heart of Palestinian neighbourhoods commonly involves forced eviction and displacement, raising tensions in the community that can create unrest.

In addition to the illegal transfer of Israeli civilians into East Jerusalem, the authorities simultaneously make life for Palestinian residents of the City more difficult. This manifests itself in a number of ways, including:

- ***Restrictions on obtaining building permits*** – Only 13 percent of East Jerusalem is zoned for Palestinian construction - much of which is already built on, compared with 35 percent which is zoned for Israeli settlements. Due to the difficulty in obtaining building permits, many Palestinians in East Jerusalem build without permits risking fines and

demolition orders. According to the UN, around 93,100 Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem live in structures without permits and are at risk of displacement. According to the same source the impact on families experiencing house demolitions or faced with demolition orders can be devastating. "Women often feel a loss of control over domestic matters and heightened sense of insecurity while men experience increased stress and anxiety. For many children, the demolition, along with the disruption to education and increased tension in the home, results in depression, anxiety and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder."²⁹

- ***Limits on freedom of movement and family reunification*** – Since 1967, Palestinians living in the east of the City have been given Israeli permanent residency status, but not citizenship. A key distinction between the two categories is that the former can be revoked. Problems arise when a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem wishes to marry a resident on the West Bank, even though both areas are considered as one occupied territory under international law. Under an Israeli law passed in 2003, restrictions are placed on the rights of Israeli citizens and permanent residents of Palestinian origin who wish to marry somebody from the West Bank. Under the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, in order for a spouse from the West Bank to legally live in East Jerusalem, women over 25 and men over 35 must apply for temporary military permits, giving rise to a life of constant uncertainty and insecurity. Persons below these age categories must apply to a special committee based on "exceptional humanitarian considerations." Since 2008, this special committee has only approved applications in 5.5 percent of cases.³⁰ If Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem leave to live with their spouses in the West Bank or elsewhere, they run the risk of having their residency rights permanently revoked – something that has happened to around 14,000 Palestinians since 1967.³¹

"It took an hour-and-a-half for the Israelis and their bulldozers to destroy the house. The whole house collapsed on top of our things, so we couldn't get anything else out. All our things were lost. My daughters had saved up money for the holidays in money boxes, but even these were lost in the rubble. [...] My daughters found out that their home had been demolished on their way home from school."

Manal Z.



Photo by GhtH.

The justification given for these restrictions on family reunification is security. However, the evidence indicates that out of 130,000 Palestinians entering Israel or East Jerusalem for the purposes of family reunification between 1994 and 2008, only 0.005 percent have been convicted of a security offence. In January 2012, the Israeli Supreme Court narrowly rejected (6-5) a petition seeking to challenge the constitutionality of the law. The five dissenting judges acknowledged the law's discriminatory nature, which permits Jewish citizens and permanent residents to marry anyone of Jewish origin, including those from "enemy states", who automatically become citizens under the Law of Return.³²

- ***Lack of services*** - As permanent residents, Palestinians living in East Jerusalem are required to pay Israeli taxes and are entitled to all rights and services that are provided to Israeli citizens, except the right to vote in general elections. However, reports indicate that far fewer resources are allocated to the Palestinian residents in the east of the City resulting in a shortage in health and educational services, welfare services, water and sewage systems and roads.³³ Taking education as an example, according to the UN, 1,000 additional classrooms are required for Palestinian children in East Jerusalem and many existing facilities are substandard or unsuitable.³⁴ Consequently, many parents resort to fee-paying alternatives even though children in East Jerusalem are entitled to free education under Israeli law. According to a recent report published by the US State Department, although Palestinians make up 35 percent of the population of Jerusalem, they only receive 10-15 percent of municipal spending.³⁵
- ***The Christian community*** - The cumulative effect of these measures is also adversely affecting the dwindling Christian community living in Jerusalem and the West Bank. According to a 2008 survey, there are 50,000 Palestinian Christians living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. According to the US State Department, the Palestinian Christian community is primarily concentrated in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem, but smaller communities live elsewhere. Citing local Christian leaders, the State Department reports that Palestinian Christian emigration has accelerated since 2001, in part due to the limited ability of Christian communities in the Jerusalem area to expand due to Israeli building restrictions and family reunification limitations imposed by the Israeli government.³⁶

Case Study 7

Name:	Rana A.
Age:	32
Location:	Issawiyeh, East Jersualem
Date of incident:	Continuing
Nature of incident:	Residency rights / House demolition

A mother of six from occupied East Jerusalem describes how her husband was forced to demolish part of their home because it was built without an Israeli building permit, and how she lives in fear of being separated from her family.³⁷

Thirty-two year old Rana is from the West Bank city of Nablus. She got married in 1994 and moved to the old city of Jerusalem to live with her husband. "We didn't have much money and lived with my mother-in-law," recalls Rana. After the birth of her first child in 1995, Rana and her husband decided to build a small room on the roof of the family house. "I so badly wanted to have my own space," says Rana. "We knew it was almost impossible to get a building permit for the room because the Israeli authorities do not grant many permits to Palestinians in East Jerusalem, but we had no choice."

"Three years after we finished the room we were issued a huge fine (US \$5,000) which we had to pay in installments. There was no mention about demolishing the house," says Rana. In about 2007, 12 years after they started building the room, Rana and her husband received a notice that they had to attend a court hearing. They appointed a lawyer. "The only thing he was able to do was to buy us time," says Rana. In about 2009, Rana and her husband received a demolition order for the room. "I was shocked beyond belief," recalls Rana. "They kept quiet for nearly 14 years and said nothing about demolishing the room. They made us pay a fine of nearly \$5,000 in installments and when we paid the whole amount they brought the demolition issue up. "To make matters worse, the authorities told us they will charge us more than US \$10,000 to demolish the room. They also said that if the room wasn't demolished in four days they would place my husband under house arrest. This would mean he would lose his job."

"In June 2010, we realised that we had no choice but to demolish the room ourselves, in the middle of my children's final school exams," recalls Rana. "My husband demolished the room with his own hands at his own



Rana A. photo by WCLAC.

expense, using a sledgehammer to save us \$10,000. My husband and I had to borrow money from my mother and my brother-in-law to pay the cost of carrying the rubble away. My mother felt so sorry for us, especially for the children, that she told us she didn't want the money back. Me and my husband, and our six children moved back in with my mother-in-law. It was terrible for us and for her," says Rana.

Later that year, Rana, her husband and children, moved to a house in the Issawiyeh neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. "Our house in the Old City was five minutes away from my children's school, now it takes at least an hour to get to school which costs us a lot of money. I feel disconnected from the world. I used to attend lectures and take part in all sorts of activities in the Old City but not anymore, but this is the only house we could afford to rent," says Rana, whose friends are also all in the Old City.

After 17 years of marriage, the Israeli authorities have still not given Rana a Jerusalem identity card. This makes it very difficult for her to see her family in Nablus. Rana first applied for a Jerusalem identity card under

the family unification programme in 1997, but it was rejected by the Israeli authorities without reason. Shortly after her application for family unification was rejected, the Israeli Ministry of Interior informed her that she had to leave East Jerusalem immediately, even though it is considered to be occupied Palestinian territory under international law. "The idea of not being able to live with my family, with my children and husband, terrified me. I worried day and night that one day I might be forced to separate from my children," says Rana.

Rana hired a lawyer who managed to get her a temporary residency permit valid for one year. "Even with this temporary residency permit I don't feel safe and secure because when it expires I have to go through the whole tedious application process again. They ask me for water and electricity bills and evidence that I have paid the Israeli municipal tax. They ask me about my family and my friends, one by one as if they are looking for the slightest excuse to deny me the permit. There is no doubt in my mind that they don't want us to live a normal life in Jerusalem. They make life impossible for us," says Rana. In July 2012, I went to renew my temporary permit, but I have not yet heard back from them. This is not the first time this has happened and it is not good news for me, it is making me anxious."

Whenever Rana's temporary permit is not renewed in time, she has to stay home until she gets a new permit. This means she cannot visit friends or go on family trips. Three years ago there was a delay in issuing her permit that meant she could not go to the hospital with her six-year-old son, who needed urgent surgery, for fear she would be ordered out of Jerusalem. "I feel like an outcast. I even felt like I was committing a crime when I attended my brother's wedding," says Rana. She also does not have any health insurance, as the insurance companies in Jerusalem do not insure non-residents. "It will cost me a lot of money next month when I go to the hospital for minor surgery. What should be routine turns into a nightmare," she says.

"During the holidays I feel miserable because all my neighbours and my friends invite their parents and relatives over for meals except me. My parents, who live in Nablus, less than two hours away, are not allowed to enter Jerusalem. I'm not allowed to invite my mother over for a meal, it is a terrible feeling. Life for a woman is hard enough in the best of circumstances, for me, a Palestinian woman in Jerusalem; life is a never-ending struggle."

Case Study 8

Name:	S.D.
Age:	21
Location:	East Jerusalem
Date of incident:	Continuing
Nature of incident:	Residency rights

A 21-year-old Palestinian Christian woman from occupied East Jerusalem describes how her freedom of movement and her right to practice her religion have been restricted by Israeli government policies.

S. is a 21-year-old Palestinian Christian woman from Jerusalem, who is studying at Bethlehem University. “My father’s family owned two houses, one in Jerusalem and another in a Christian village in the West Bank,” says S. “The house in the village was the family’s summer house. After my father separated from his first wife, he gave her the Jerusalem house and moved to the village where he started a new family. He did not realise at the time that giving up the Jerusalem house was going to cost us our right to live in Jerusalem,” says S.

“When I turned 15 I went to the Israeli Ministry of Interior to have my Jerusalem identity card issued. Without an identity card I am unable to enter Jerusalem or travel abroad or even within the West Bank. I thought this was going to be a routine procedure as was the case with my older siblings, but I was wrong. I went with my mother and we were unlucky to have an employee at the ministry who was unhelpful and rude. As required, I had my birth certificate which proved I was born in Jerusalem but the official told me it wasn’t enough. He asked for my school certificate. He also asked my mother for proof that we pay the Jerusalem municipal tax. My heart sank when I heard this and I felt my life was going to be hard from now on. I could not understand the link between school certificates and identity cards. It felt as if someone had slammed a door in my face.”

“We could not present Jerusalem tax slips since we left the house in Jerusalem. My school certificates were not going to be of any help since what the authorities are looking for is proof that I live in Jerusalem. What bothered me most was the manner in which the official treated my mother. I was very upset when I saw how disrespectful he was. I asked him to be polite but he became worse. He accused me of not having enough

interest in a Jerusalem identity card and immediately typed something into the computer. My mother and I felt it was best if we left, and we did.”

“At this time I used my birth certificate and a temporary travel document to move around the West Bank and at checkpoints. I also traveled abroad, but when the temporary travel document expired I began to have problems. Soldiers at checkpoints would not let me cross: I was 16 which meant I was no longer able to use my birth certificate as an official document and my temporary travel document had expired. That is when I decided to go back to the Israeli Ministry of Interior hoping this time a different official would process my application. Unfortunately, the same official dealt with me. He asked me again for my school certificates and for the tax slips. My mother and I decided to appoint a lawyer. I was 17 by then. The lawyer was able to get the Ministry to issue me with a piece of paper valid for two months which allowed me to cross checkpoints pending the completion of my application for a Jerusalem identity card. But processing my application took much longer than two months,” recalls S.

“When I turned 20 I went back to the Ministry. This time I had municipality tax slips; my brother and I had rented a small apartment in Jerusalem which was very expensive. During this time I went to Bethlehem University and was stuck there for months. I could not go home to see my family during holidays without official documents that would allow me to cross checkpoints. I also could not go to Jerusalem on Sundays or any other day. This bothered me a lot because I am an active member of the church. All my friends traveled and I could not. I couldn’t visit my doctor in Jerusalem when I had some health problem, or attend my niece’s wedding in Jerusalem two weeks ago. The whole family went and I stayed home. I was miserable.”

“I sometimes cry, not only because of my situation but because I am worried that the authorities will chase my brothers and sister and strip them of their rights. This is what happened with other families; one person would have an issue with the authorities and the whole family situation is undermined. Unfortunately they are succeeding. Our financial situation is not great and I cannot afford to rent a house in Jerusalem. I sometimes take risks and travel within the West Bank without documents but I panic when the car I am in approaches a checkpoint, I never know what to expect. It happened twice that soldiers asked me to step out of the car and sent me back home.”

“If I marry someone from Jerusalem and have children we won’t be able to live in Jerusalem as a family. Jerusalem is being emptied of its Palestinian residents, one person at a time. For us Christians the problem is worse.”

The Gaza Strip



Photo by RIWAQ.

“Before the blockade, my husband used to make good money working in Israel. With the blockade, that all stopped. When he can’t find any work and we have nothing to eat, he blames me. He is like a crazy animal. I stay quiet when he hits me. Afterwards, he cries and says, if he had a job he wouldn’t beat me.”

Eman
- The Guardian,
30 July 2012

Just like the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Gaza was occupied by Israeli forces in 1967. Under the “disengagement plan” in 2005, Israel removed its permanent military presence and civilian settlers from Gaza, but continues to maintain control over the borders, territorial water, airspace, the Palestinian population registry and some aspects of taxation.³⁸ This level of control imposes a number of legal obligations on Israel including ensuring that everyday life and economic activity functions, as far as possible, as normal.

Although the Gaza Strip is an integral part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, it has become increasingly isolated from the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the rest of the world since the Israeli government imposed a blockade on the territory in June

2007. The Israeli authorities justify these measures as a means to protect Israeli civilians and soldiers from attacks by Palestinian armed factions. However, breaches of international law by other parties can not absolve Israel of fulfilling its legal obligations to the people of Gaza, and does not justify the collective punishment of 1.6 million people.

“I sometimes wonder why I even bother studying, what use is education under these circumstances? I have no hope for the future; the situation is a disaster with no end in sight. I can hardly say I have a life here in Gaza.”

Bara’a Q.

Under the blockade, freedom of movement for both people and goods has been severely restricted, causing serious damage to the territory’s economy. A buffer zone has been unilaterally imposed by the Israeli military which is stated to extend 300 metres into Gaza. Anyone entering this 300 metre buffer zone can be shot on sight, although there have been reports of civilians being fired upon up to 1,500 metres from the border, resulting in Palestinians being totally or partially prevented from accessing land located up to

1,500 metres from the border, resulting in a loss of 35 percent of Gaza’s agricultural land. Similarly at sea, the fishermen of Gaza are restricted to working within 3,000 metres from the shore, which in effect has virtually

destroyed a thriving fishing industry. According to the UN, these restrictions have had a devastating impact on the physical security and livelihoods of around 180,000 people, exasperating an already bleak humanitarian situation.³⁹ The restriction on freedom of movement also affects higher education, as most applications for permits to study in universities in the West Bank are rejected. In July 2012, the Israeli Defense Ministry announced that it would not allow five female students from Gaza to study at Birzeit University in the West Bank. This is in spite of the State conceding at the hearing of a court challenge in May that there were no security issues concerning the five students yet the refusal was part of a blanket ban.⁴⁰

"The number of psychiatric patients is on the increase because of the deteriorating living conditions in Gaza, but the Israeli quota for medications allowed in is fixed and is hardly enough. [...] I wouldn't be surprised if patients with deep depression, who don't find the drugs they need, commit suicide."

R.H.

Consequently, recent reports indicate that the Gaza Strip has become more conservative, and unemployment, poverty, depression and domestic violence are on the rise. With 45 percent unemployment, "women and children are often on the receiving end of men's frustration."⁴¹ This assessment seems to be borne out by a recent study published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) which found that 51 percent of married women in Gaza had experienced domestic violence in the previous 12 months, with less than one percent saying they would seek help.⁴²

Perhaps most alarmingly, the UN is now predicting that unless the restrictions on Gaza are lifted, the territory will become unliveable by 2020.⁴³

Case study 9

Name:	Wala' J.
Age:	22
Location:	Gaza Strip
Date of incident:	Continuing
Nature of incident:	Poverty

A 22 year-old woman from Gaza describes her family's economic situation and the day her husband was shot in the leg working close to the border with Israel.

Wala' is a 22-year-old woman from the Gaza Strip. She is married and has a son who is nine-months old. Like many families in Gaza, Wala's husband is unemployed. He used to work in a sewing factory but he lost his job a long time ago because of the blockade. Having looked for a job without success, Wala's husband Ahmad, decided to collect gravel from the "buffer zone", along the border with Israel where the settlements used to be. Gravel used in construction is a rare commodity in the Gaza Strip since the blockade. Ahmad sold the gravel he collected to construction workers who used it to build and maintain homes destroyed during the war in 2008. "My husband brought home 30 Shekels (\$9) every four days or so and we managed," says Wala', "I had no complaints."

On 6 April 2010, Wala's husband was shot in the leg by Israeli soldiers while collecting gravel and as a result lost his ability to work. Wala' was devastated; her family's only source of income was suddenly lost and with it her dreams. This forced her to make tough choices like the decision to move back in with her parents. "I moved back to my parents' place for two reasons," says Wala', "my house is made of tin and it gets unbearably hot during the summer. I also moved back so that my parents can support me and my son. I have no money to buy food for him; I can't bear to see him lose weight."

"My husband visits us from time to time but I can hardly say I have a relationship with him; we are not a family anymore. I am waiting for a miracle to happen for my life to change, but it doesn't look like anything will change soon. I have no money to buy milk for my son; I have no money to buy food for my family; I have nothing."

"I regret ever having a child," says Wala'. "I feel I brought my son into a situation he doesn't deserve."

Case Study 10

Name:	Bara'a Q.
Age:	21
Location:	Gaza Strip
Date of incident:	May 2012
Nature of incident:	Power shortage

A 21-year-old woman from the Gaza Strip describes the difficulties she faces trying to study during frequent power cuts.

"I am studying business administration at the Islamic university in Gaza," says 21-year-old Bara'a. "My course requires me to do a lot of research on the internet and this is almost impossible in Gaza because of the frequent power cuts. We either have electricity during the day for a few hours or during the night but not both. If on one day we have electricity during the day then the following day we will have electricity at night and *visa versa*. If I am in class during the day I cannot do my research until I go home in the evening and if there is no electricity that night it means I have lost precious time and there is nothing I can do."

"The problem got worse with the fuel shortage in recent months, which meant we couldn't use the electric generators to generate electricity. When it is possible to find fuel in service stations the prices are so high that turning the generators on costs a fortune," says Bara'a. "I sometimes feel I need to reconsider continuing my education because it has become such a hassle. I am under tremendous pressure. I sometimes stay up all night when there is electricity in order to do my research and to study and this exhausts me. I find I am unable to function the following day. I sometimes light a candle and try to read but this hurts my eyes and gives me headaches. When I get so tired I go to study at a friend's or a relative's house if they happen to have electricity in their area. I find this to be very distracting; I simply cannot focus on my work," says Bara'a.

To make matters even worse, public transportation has become very expensive because of the fuel shortages. I think a thousand times before I make a decision to go to a friend's house. I pay double what I used to pay before the fuel shortage. I also have to queue in line for a long time, sometimes in the rain, sometimes in the hot sun because less and less cars are available and more people depend on public transportation.



Woman studying by candle light, photo by WCLAC.

Arguments and even fights erupt between passengers and taxi drivers over prices. This I find unbearable. I sometimes wonder why I even bother studying, what use is education under these circumstances? I have no hope for the future; the situation is a disaster with no end in sight. I can hardly say I have a life here in Gaza.”

According to the UN (OCHA), the Gaza Strip has been experiencing power cuts for up to 12 hours per day for most of the year. The Gaza Power Plant continues to produce only one-third of its capacity due to a lack of fuel. Limited amounts of fuel continue to enter Gaza through the tunnels from Egypt. To compensate for the ongoing fuel shortage, Gaza private companies are importing fuel from Israel, although the price of fuel purchased from Israel is more than double the price of that transferred from Egypt.

Concluding Remarks



Photo by Juman Nijim.

This report seeks to illustrate, through the eyes of women, how for the past 45 years, Israeli military and civilian authorities have sought to establish permanent control over much of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Although usually described as a military occupation, this legal categorisation fails to accurately define what is actually occurring on the ground, day by day, house by house, family by family – a *de facto* annexation. This relentless process has been well described by one Israeli organisation as follows:⁴⁴

“The goal is to confine 4 million residents of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza to small enclaves, thus effectively foreclosing any viable Palestinian state and ensuring Israeli control, and to allow for the expropriation of land, the ethnic displacement of Palestinians, and the *Judaization* of the occupied West Bank.

In the cantonization plan pursued by the current and previous Israeli governments, Israel would annex the settlement blocs containing 80% of the settlers in addition to ‘greater Jerusalem’ and the Jordan Valley. It would *Judaize* approximately 85% of the country, leaving the Palestinians with disconnected enclaves on only 15% of the land. Israel would control all the borders, all the sea and airports, Palestinian airspace, the electro-magnetic sphere (communications), and West Bank seam zones. In this version of the two-state solution, the Palestinians would be deprived of meaningful self-determination. The Palestinian ‘state’ would have only limited sovereignty and no viable economy. While it would be expected to absorb all the refugees who wish to return, it would have no economic potential for development and could offer no prospect for its future generations.”

The process described above has been playing out on a daily basis across the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip for over four decades. The testimonies of women presented in this report bear witness and provide a glimpse into these practices. For example, women speak of the sense of fear and intimidation experienced by repeated night-time military raids in which soldiers come into their houses, and even into their bedrooms, because they dare to protest against the creeping annexation. The report

looks at a similar form of intimidation perpetrated this time by armed settlers, as soldiers stand idly by. In other parts of the report, women describe how Palestinian society living in the West Bank (Area C), East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip is coming under increasing pressure in the form of severe building restrictions and property demolition, an economic blockade and freedom of movement limitations which affect everything from where you can live, where you can study, and even who you can marry. Through the use of these discriminatory and restrictive planning laws that violate international law, Palestinians are being squeezed and corralled into an ever shrinking space.

Less publicised are the devastating effects these policies have on the physical and psychological wellbeing of women, and in particular, on mothers. Through research conducted in early 2012, the following psychological symptoms typical of those living with continuous and sequential trauma were identified: insomnia, tension headaches, hypertension, heart disease, gastro-intestinal ailments, hypervigilance, irritability, agitation, and panic attacks. Further, mothers anticipating nighttime incursions, the arrest of a child, the imminent fear of being separated from their children, the demolition or seizure of their homes, settler violence, and the denial of residency rights reported exceedingly high levels of anticipatory terror and dread that adversely impacted their capacity to parent effectively. Mothers who experienced repeated, unpredictable violence over a greater length of time and with more intensity, also exhibited chronic depression, dissociative symptoms, psychic numbing, and other personality impairments affecting cognition, emotional regulation, intimacy, interpersonal relatedness, and overall identity.⁴⁵

Perhaps the only remaining question to be asked is: does anybody believe that these policies are likely to lead to a just and lasting peace?

Recommended Action

There are a number of ways you can take action on the issues raised in this report and support the work of WCLAC.

Write to your elected representative:- Contact your elected representatives, wherever you are, and raise one or more of the issues in this report with them and demand effective action.

Visit Palestine:- Join a study tour to the region.

Twinning and friendship links:- Establish a twinning or friendship link between your town, university, school or union and one in the region. This is an effective way of drawing the human rights situation to the people in your locality.

Become better informed:- The following websites provide useful information on the situation in Israel/Palestine:

- Adalah - www.adalah.org/eng/
- Al-Haq - www.alhaq.org
- Al Mezan - www.mezan.org/en/
- Breaking the Silence - www.breakingthesilence.org.il
- B'Tselem - www.btselem.org
- Defence for Children International (DCI) - www.dci-pal.org
- Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) - www.ichad.org
- Palestinian Centre for Humanr Rights (PCHR) - www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/
- UN Office for the Co-Ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) - www.ochaopt.org
- Who Profits - www.whoprofits.org

Appendix



Photo by WCLAC.

Case study 11

Name:	Rana H.
Age:	20
Location:	An Nabi Saleh, West Bank
Date of incident:	6 July 2012
Nature of incident:	Soldier violence

On 6 July 2012, a 20-year-old woman from Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank, is beaten by Israeli soldiers as she demonstrates against the expansion of an illegal settlement near the village of An Nabi Saleh.

Rana often goes to the village of An Nabi Saleh on Fridays to take part in the weekly protest. The protest is against the take over by settlers from Halamish of a village spring in 2009. Friday, 6 July 2012, was no different.

“As usual, I went to Nabi Saleh to take part in the weekly protest,” recalls Rana. The protesters marched down the main street and headed off to the land where the spring is located. The soldiers responded with tear gas and rubber-coated bullets to disperse the demonstrators. Me and a friend decided to go towards the land where an Israeli army watch tower is located; we wanted to witness the clashes that were taking place there between soldiers and some young men from the village. The owner of the land, Atallah, came with us. It was about 3:00 pm and we stood there and watched when a group of soldiers started to shout at us telling us to go away. Atallah told them it was his land and that he had the right to be there but they did not listen to him. We felt we needed to stay there when we saw that Atallah and the soldiers were having an argument. We wanted to give Atallah some kind of protection just by being there. The argument heated up and the soldiers wanted to arrest Atallah. When we tried to stand between him and the soldiers they decided to arrest all of us. They tied our hands with plastic ties and asked us to sit on the ground by a jeep,” says Rana.

“A female soldier who was there was particularly vicious,” recalls Rana. “She beat me each time I lifted my head up or tried to speak to her. She pulled my hair very aggressively. Atallah who was standing nearby, caught my eye just when the female soldier pulled my hair. I smiled back at him and gestured to him that I was o.k. This made the female soldier go mad. She slapped me very hard on my back and shouted at me saying I shouldn’t smile. She then handed her mobile phone to one of the other

soldiers and asked him to take a photo of her standing next to me and my friend sitting on the ground with our hands tied behind our backs. She smiled and held a Palestinian flag as the other soldier took the picture. This was a very humiliating experience. I felt I needed to cry but I held back because I didn't want the female soldier to feel triumphant."



"The soldiers asked Atallah to call home for his identity card. When his wife brought it to the soldiers they released him but my friend and I together with another Israeli person were taken to Benjamina interrogation centre. The female soldier was with us in the jeep and she slapped me without any provocation. She insulted me the whole way," recalls Rana.

"In Benjamina someone took my finger prints and a saliva sample for DNA. They also took pictures of me. The commander told me I was accused of hitting a soldier and of obstructing his work. He also accused me of being present in a closed military area. I remained silent the whole time except when he told me I was accused of hitting a soldier. I denied this accusation and told him I did not hit anyone."

"We were kept in Benjamina from 4:00 p.m. until 2:00 a.m. the next day. My friend and I were then put in a jeep and were driven to Ofer prison near Ramallah, where we were kept in an outdoor cell because Ofer is not equipped to accommodate women. I remained in Ofer until 4:00 a.m. I was then taken in a police car to Hasharon prison inside Israel. The car was partitioned into small sections like cages and I could hardly fit. I was shackled and handcuffed the whole time. In Hasharon I was strip searched which was a terrible experience. I was then placed in solitary confinement in a small cell for two days. My friend was released at Ofer because she was an American citizen and her visa expired in a week. She was released on condition that she did not take part in the weekly protests.

"I was put in a section with the other Palestinian female political prisoners but I was not allowed to speak to them. I spent most of the time sleeping since I was in solitary confinement."

"On Monday I appeared in front of a judge. My lawyer was able to argue for my release since they released my friend who was accused of the same offences. He also showed a video of my arrest which proved I did not hit any one. I was released after the court hearing, but without my personal belongings, they are still in Hasharon prison and I haven't been able to get them back yet."

Case Study 12

Name:	Hamda M.
Age:	43
Location:	Beit Ummar, West Bank
Date of incident:	February 2012
Nature of incident:	Soldier violence

A 43-year-old mother from Beit Ummar, near Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, describes repeated night raids on her home and the arrest of her children, and soldier violence.

“Our village is surrounded by settlements in all directions and a road used by the army and settlers passes close by,” says Hamda. “We have lots of problems because of the settlements and because of this road. Many children are arrested and the village is raided by the army almost every day. The first three months of this year alone were a disaster,” recalls Hamda.

“I was at home getting ready to sleep on a cold winter night in mid-February. I don’t remember the exact date. I found it hard to sleep so I looked out the window to the hill across the valley where the settlement of Karmi Zur is built. I saw army jeeps and soldiers moving around and I immediately knew this was not good news for the village. I woke my husband and told him it looked like the village might be raided. I wondered who the unlucky mother was whose son will be arrested tonight. It did not occur to me that they might be raiding our house.”

“My husband went to the bathroom and came back and told me soldiers were surrounding our house. I didn’t believe him, so I looked out to see for myself. I wondered who they were looking for. My son Yousef was already in prison and my other children are too young. I thought maybe this time they had come for my husband,” recalls Hamda.

“I got dressed. It was around 2:30 a.m. when we heard the knock at the door. When my husband went to the balcony overlooking the entrance the soldiers verbally abused him. I think they recognised him because he takes part in the weekly demonstration against the settlements. They called my husband a dog and a donkey and my husband answered them back. They told him to come down and open the front gate. We all went down with him. They asked to see my husband’s identity card. They looked at the details and read the names of our children registered on the card.



Hamda M. holding a picture of her son Yousef, photo by WCLAC.

One of the soldiers asked for our son Mohammad who was standing next to me. When Mohammad identified himself one of the soldiers grabbed him by the front of his T-shirt and pulled him aside."

"I was shocked when I realised they had come for Mohammad," recalls Hamda. "He is only 15 years old. When my other son Hamza saw they were about to arrest his brother he kicked a soldier. I got into an argument with a soldier too. I wanted to know why they were arresting Mohammad. 'He hasn't done anything wrong,' I shouted, 'he is only 15, leave him alone,' but they did not listen to me," says Hamda.

"Minutes later they took Mohammad away on foot. They did not tie his hands or blindfold him, but later my sister-in-law, who lives next door, told me she saw him blindfolded with his hands tied behind his back. She also told me that the young men in the neighbourhood started throwing stones at the soldiers. She saw that they put Mohammad in front and used him as a shield to protect themselves from the stones. They shouted at Mohammad and told him to tell the young men not to throw stones. Mohammad later told me that he was hit by two stones."

Hamda's son Mohammad was detained for several days at the settlement of Karmi Zur, then Gush Etzion settlement and finally at Ofer prison, near Ramallah. All this time we didn't know where he was or why he was taken. We contacted an Israeli human rights organisation who later told us he was in Ofer. They also told us he was assigned a military court hearing and that he was accused of many things," says Hamda.

"That night I wasn't able to sleep at all. I was worried about Mohammad and feared that they might beat him up. I felt sick for three days and stayed in bed. This is what happens to me each time my house is raided and one of my children is arrested. This is an unbearable situation; living in constant fear is affecting my health. I have high blood pressure and I sometimes have problems breathing. I take medicine to keep me going. It is very hard. Luckily Mohammad was released on bail several days later, but my other son, Yousef, is still in jail. He was arrested in October 2011."

"Yousef's arrest was a terrible experience for me," says Hamda. "They beat him on his head in front of my eyes. They tied his hands behind his back and took him away. They forced him on the ground with his face down and then crushed his head with their boots. I saw about 15 soldiers taking turns to beat and kick him all over his body, even in his sensitive parts. They beat him with plastic batons. He screamed out in pain and called for me. When I approached to try to protect him a soldier hit me with the back of his gun in my chest. I was in severe pain and later found out that my rib was fractured. I still feel pain in my chest nearly six months later."

"Yousef and I are very close. He is kind-hearted and always offers to help. He is detained in a prison inside Israel and I haven't seen him for months. I applied for a permit to enter Israel to visit him but my application was rejected. It is killing me that I cannot see his face and speak to him. When I attended court I saw how badly he was treated; there were bruises all over his face and he had lost weight," recalls Hamda.

"The happiest time for me is when I have all my children around me at home. I cook for them, I chat with them and I know they are safe. Unfortunately we haven't had a peaceful time together in a long time. My house was raided so much during the last six months that I can't even remember how many times. Night raids have become a routine. This affects the young children and disturbs the relationship between the adults. We are all anxious and tense all the time and have no tolerance for each other. I sometimes blame my husband for this situation and he blames me. He doesn't have a regular job and he spends a lot of time at home. "

“If my husband could find regular work things would be much easier for us. We can hardly make ends meet. We also have to pay a lot of money for lawyers and fines; it is very hard. The village has lost so much land to the settlements and we lost so much income we used to receive from agriculture. The situation is not looking good, not for my husband and not for my children. There is nothing to look forward to in the future. I am sad and I have lost hope.”

Case study 13

Name:	Deema M.
Age:	18
Location:	Gaza Strip
Date of incident:	Continuing
Nature of incident:	Freedom of movement

An 18-year-old Christian woman from the Gaza Strip describes how the Israeli authorities prevent her family from spending Christmas and Easter together in Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

“Gaza is like a big prison,” says 18-year-old Deema. “We are not allowed to travel, not even to the West Bank or East Jerusalem to visit family and friends. I can’t even go there for Christmas or Easter. I am unable to connect with other young Palestinian Christians in my own country. There is a blanket travel ban imposed on all residents of Gaza by the Israeli authorities. Special permits are sometimes granted to people who need special medical treatment or want to travel during the holidays, but only if they are older than 35 years.”

“Last time I was allowed to visit Bethlehem was two years ago when I was 16 and still considered a child,” says Deema. “I traveled with my parents and my younger sister and brother. While we were in Bethlehem the Israeli army launched an attack on Gaza. We were very worried about my other three sisters who were not allowed to travel to Bethlehem with us. I was so worried that something might happen to them. We tried to get them out through the Orthodox Church, the Greek government, and the Red Cross, but it was impossible. We were told that even if a permit was issued, traveling would be too dangerous.”

"The authorities issue travel permits to some members of a family but not to all of them. Nearly everybody I know who was allowed to travel from Gaza to the West Bank had to travel either without their mother or father or sister or brother. I sometimes think it is better not to travel at all than travel and leave my sisters behind," says Deema. It's even worse when I am the one left behind. This is exactly what happened to me last Christmas. A permit was issued to my parents and younger siblings but not to me, or my older siblings. It wasn't a real Christmas for me without all my family. I watched the celebrations on television and felt very sad I couldn't be there with my parents. There is no atmosphere of Christmas in Gaza and to be able to take part in the celebrations in Bethlehem means a lot to me. I cried the whole time. I just wanted to celebrate with my family but I was not allowed."

According to Deema, there are approximately 2,000 Palestinian Christians in Gaza, out of a total population of 1.6 million. "We are generally left alone to live our lives but since Gaza is becoming more conservative we sometimes feel like we are the odd ones out and this makes us feel uncomfortable. There are only four Christian students in my entire school. We are a small community and it is crucial for us to connect with other Christians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem."

"I would like to go to university in the West Bank but this is impossible. I need to wait until I am 35 before I'm issued a permit by the Israeli authorities to visit the West Bank. There are universities in Gaza but they don't offer as many subjects. It is the worse thing in the world not to have choice. When I am older and think of getting married I won't be able to marry a Christian man from the West Bank or from Jerusalem. It is almost impossible to meet a man from the West Bank, but if I do we won't be able to live together. West Bank Palestinians are not allowed to visit Gaza let alone live here, and Palestinians from Gaza are not allowed to visit the West Bank. Palestinian society is being torn apart," says Deema. "All Palestinians suffer from these restrictions but the strain on Palestinian Christians is felt more because of our small numbers."

"I feel I am locked up in a prison against my will for no reason," she says. "It is hard not to become frustrated. It doesn't look like the situation will change any time soon. It seems as though the whole world has forgotten us."

Case study 14

Name:	Aida R.
Age:	39
Location:	Silwan, East Jerusalem
Date of incident:	Continuing
Nature of incident:	Threat of house demolition

A mother from the al Bustan neighbourhood of Silwan, in occupied East Jerusalem, describes living under the constant threat of having the family home demolished, and the effects on her family.⁴⁶

Thirty-nine-year old Aida was born in Silwan, and her family has lived in the area for generations. Aida and her husband, Yacoub, have seven children. 'Like most of the homes in Bustan, my home is under threat of demolition,' says Aida.

'Nearly 10 years ago, I inherited some land in Silwan from my family, so we decided to save up and also borrow some money in order to build our own house. By 2005, we had got together enough money to start building, but it was a slow process because we didn't have much money and so could only build a bit at a time. We didn't apply for a permit for the house, because we knew that they don't give permits to build in Silwan. We know that they have plans for this neighbourhood which is not to allow the Palestinians to build homes here. But I couldn't live anywhere else, this is my land and I have a right to be here,' says Aida.

In June 2006, some Municipality officials came to the house with police and soldiers and took photographs. They left a leaflet saying that the house would almost certainly be demolished. Aida and her husband went to see a lawyer who advised them to move in immediately, even though the house was not complete and still had no doors or windows. 'We were sleeping in the house but living in fear that soldiers and police would come in the middle of the night,' recalls Aida, but nothing happened for over 18 months. 'Then one day, in February 2008, they arrived early in the morning,' says Aida. 'The children were all at home because there wasn't school and we were still in our pyjamas. It was the army together with the men from the municipality. When the door was opened they pushed through the door. The soldiers were carrying big guns. The children were terrified and hid behind my back,' remembers Aida.

"My husband argued with them and said "talk to me, can't you see how frightened the children are?" One of the men from the municipality took our identification cards. I asked him what he wanted and he said: "You have built on land owned by the State." I replied: "How is it State land, when it is owned by my grandfather? I'm not building in Tel Aviv." He then said that we didn't have a permit to build and asked if we had proof that we were paying the municipal tax. I did and showed him the receipts. He then handed me a paper that stated that if we didn't leave the house in 21 days it would be demolished and we would have to pay 70,000 shekels."

"It was very distressing," recalls Aida, "here were lots of soldiers standing around the house. My husband was in a bad way. He was very upset about what had happened and was also feeling sorry for himself – he was talking about how he had borrowed the money and soon he would lose the house and be left with debt. He was so upset and helpless, it was awful. Later that day, his condition got worse and he was having problems with his chest. In the evening, it was so bad that he went to the neighbours and asked them to take him to hospital. At the hospital they said he had had a heart attack, and that he had to stay there for four days. He recovered, but his heart is now weak and vulnerable and he was advised to avoid stress," says Aida.

"I was terrified and the stress was doubled by what had happened to my husband. I didn't feel safe for me or my children, and I expect them to come back and demolish the house at any moment. I feel lost. What will I do without my home or my husband? I can't find the words to express how I feel," says Aida. "For me the problem was that they were not simply going to demolish the house, but they were also going to take the land, then we would have nothing. I would be prepared to live in a tent on the land, but if they took the land as well, that would be devastating." Aida reports that there have been a number of court hearings to try and save the house, but nothing has been resolved, and every time they go to court it costs them 500 shekels.

"In June 2012 the neighbourhood lawyer informed the residents that the authorities are going to demolish the houses in Al-Bustan by September 2012. I was devastated when I heard the news. The authorities give us contradictory information: once they said only 29 houses would be demolished but then they say all 88 houses will be demolished. I don't feel the lawyer trusts what the authorities tell him. The official messages are not clear and this makes it worse."

"Lately we have noticed a lot of activity by the soldiers, the police and even the under-cover units. They enter Al-Bustan almost every night. I hear them during the night and I wake up. I hardly sleep these days. Many young men



Aida R., photo by WCLAC .

and even children are being rounded up, harassed and put in prison. Those who are released without charge are told to stay out of the neighbourhood for months. This scares me. If indeed they will demolish the house in September there will be no one left in the neighbourhood to protest. They are waging a war against the neighbourhood . Things are not looking good and I feel we are alone, I feel helpless and vulnerable. I lose my temper for no reason. I shout at the children and I am impatient with my husband who does not have a regular job these days. The level of stress in the house is very high and the atmosphere is tense. The children will pay the price."

"I'm also worried about my son; there have been lots of children arrested recently by the Israelis, children as young as 10 or 12 years. My son is 12 years old and I don't allow him to leave the house to play with his friends. I am worried that he might be arrested by under-cover units. He begs me to go out but I don't allow him. It is the worst feeling not being able to protect your children. My children often ask me about the house and whether it will be demolished and where they will go if that happens, and how they will find me if it is demolished with me inside it. The children are very creative and like making ceramics and crafts. They keep the things they've made by their pillows so they can take them with them if they have to get out of the house in a hurry. For a long time, they also used to take their favourite toys with them to school because they didn't want to lose them if the house is demolished while they are at school."

"I believe that the Israelis want to get rid of the Palestinians in the area, as if we are an outdated product, as if we are dispensable. But I don't believe that they will succeed," says Aida.

Endnotes

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2. UN Charter - Article 2; see also International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (2004).
3. The illegality of the settlements was confirmed by the legal adviser to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in an advice dated 18 September 1967. In the advice, T.Meron, unequivocally stated that "civilian settlement in the administered territories contravenes explicit provisions in the Fourth Geneva Convention." The advice is available on line at: <http://is.gd/bX6yeJ>
4. US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011 - Israel and the occupied territories. Available at: <http://is.gd/7zvQG4>; see also Children in military custody: A report written by a delegation of British lawyers on the treatment of Palestinian children under Israeli military law, June 2012 - paragraph 14. Available at: <http://is.gd/EM6lmu>
5. Palestinian villages that frequently hold Friday demonstrations include: An Nabi Saleh; Beit Ummar; Ni'lin; Bil'in; Al Walaja; Al Ma'sara; Kafr ad Dik; and Kafr Qadoun. As to the illegality of the Wall, see: International Court of Justice (ICJ), advisory opinion (2004) on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
6. US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011 - the occupied territories. Available at: <http://is.gd/7zvQG4>
7. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) - Israeli settler violence in the West Bank, November 2011. Available at: <http://is.gd/pp7yoq>
8. Yesh Din - Criminal Accountability of Israeli Civilians. Available at: <http://is.gd/WWTJaj>
9. UNOCHA - Israeli settler violence in the West Bank, November 2011. Available at: <http://is.gd/pp7yoq> UNOCHA - Protection of Civilians Weekly Report (27 June - 10 July 2012). Available at: <http://is.gd/dshdco>
10. *Ibid*
11. B'Tselem - Violence by Settlers. Available at: <http://is.gd/ALiRQP>
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14. Yesh Din - "Law Enforcement upon Israeli Civilians in the West Bank," (27 March 2012). Available at: <http://is.gd/vtmhRU>
15. Yesh Din, Alleged Investigation: The Failure of Investigations into Offenses Committed by IDF Soldiers Against Palestinians (August 2011) - page 101
16. US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011 - Israel and the occupied territories. Available at: <http://is.gd/7zvQG4>
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18. EU statement, 5 September 2012 - Available at: <http://is.gd/PjyzvE>
19. Haaretz, 18 August 2012 - Available at: <http://is.gd/iOkU5V>
20. Breaking the Silence, Soldiers' Testimonies: Children and Youth 2005-2011
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22. UNOCHA – “Restricting Space: The Planning Regime Applied by Israel in Area C of the West Bank,” (December 2009). Available at: <http://is.gd/zdAhOU>
23. UNOCHA – Protection of Civilians Weekly Report (27 June – 10 July 2012). Available at: <http://is.gd/dshdco>
24. Article 54 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions (1977); and Diakonia – “Israel’s Administrative Destruction of Cisterns in Area C of the West Bank,” (September 2011). Available at: <http://is.gd/KYnRyX>
25. *Ibid*
26. This statement has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this statement are the sole responsibility of Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union
27. UN Security Council resolution 298 of 1977. See also the International Court of Justice’s Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (2004).
28. UNOCHA – Settlements in Palestinian residential areas in East Jerusalem (April 2012). Available at: <http://is.gd/scfDQy>
29. UNOCHA – Demolitions and forced displacement in the occupied West Bank (January 2012). Available at: <http://is.gd/phRYb4>
30. UNOCHA – Monthly Humanitarian Monitor (January 2012). Available at: <http://is.gd/swGVhj>
31. UNOCHA – East Jerusalem: Key humanitarian concerns (December 2011). Available at: <http://is.gd/g4skVT>
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33. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI). Available at: <http://is.gd/t3vxQh>
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35. US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011 – Israel and the occupied territories. Available at: <http://is.gd/7zvQG4>
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37. See endnote 26
38. Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement
39. UNOCHA, Special Focus: Between the Fence and a Hard Place, August 2010. Available at: <http://is.gd/gaSkzn>
40. Gisha, Despite Supreme Court recommendation: State upholds refusal to allow gender study students to travel from Gaza to the West Bank. Available at: <http://is.gd/CsCYLQ>
41. The Guardian, “Women in Gaza: How life has changed,” 30 July 2012. Available at: <http://is.gd/OKZiuN>
42. Available at: <http://is.gd/mmHDU8>
43. UN News Centre, 27 August 2012 - Available at: <http://is.gd/fdV5gA>
44. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) - <http://is.gd/tY4EuH>
45. In March 2012, WCLAC staff member Salwa Duaibis and visiting clinical psychologist, Judy Roth, PhD, conducted an exploratory, qualitative study, using extensive interviews of mothers in their 30’s and 40’s living in the friction points of the West Bank and East Jerusalem (near settlements and by-pass roads). One of the purposes of the study was to gauge the psychological impact of night-time incursions and child detention on mothers.
46. See endnote 26



Qalandia checkpoint, photo by Martin Hauschild.