



On the Record: Palestinian Civil Society Under Siege

Issue 3: Betrayed by Oslo

Contents:

- From the Editorial Desk: Why Oslo is Dead
- In the News: Human Rights Worker Barred From Work (June 6, 2001)
- Oslo Through the Eyes of Palestinian Civil Society
- From Optimism to Hostility
- A Question of Land
- Settlements: Magnets for Insecurity
- Human Rights and Closure
- Camp David
- The Post Mortem
- Sharon's Provocation
- Declaration of War

From the Editorial Desk: Why Oslo is Dead

The world was aghast at the collapse of the Camp David conference in July, 2000 and even more aghast when the second Palestinian uprising broke out two months later. How could the Oslo peace process come unraveled so quickly? How could this partnership descend so quickly and brutally into violence? How to get peace talks back on track?

Eight months later, the international community has still not found answers to these questions, and the result has been a frightening escalation on both sides of the divide. Israel has tried to seal off the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip and sent in tanks, fighter planes, attack helicopters, and sharpshooters. Five hundred Palestinians have been killed and almost 15,000 seriously injured. But this has not deterred the Palestinian suicide bombers, whose attacks are growing ever more lethal.

The world has been sleepwalking through this crisis -- watching with disgust and dismay, but from a distance. This clearly has to end. The international community has a duty to protect lives and preserve peace. But if they are to intervene constructively, governments must draw the right conclusions about why Oslo failed.

They must also listen to the right voices. This series presents the views of some of the leaders of Palestinian civil society. For five years they have struggled to build respect for the rule of law and for human rights, in the face of antagonism, criticism, and even violence from their own people. They, more than anyone, else have a right to be heard.

These eminent Palestinians are convinced that there must be a resumption of the dialogue

between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. As one of them told this delegation, 'there can be no turning back the clock on the peace process.' But at the same time, they feel that the Oslo model cannot be revived. There must be a new start and a new approach.

This is not the way they hoped it would be when the Oslo process began in 1993. Most of them wanted Oslo to work. But their optimism turned to alarm as they became convinced that Oslo was imposing a peace on the Palestinians that reinforced Israel's occupation.

Many people outside the Middle East, particularly Americans, would strongly disagree with this interpretation. They would say that Israel took a massive risk in agreeing to negotiate directly with Yasser Arafat -- a sworn foe of Israel -- and in granting the Palestinians limited autonomy. They might also have read that Israel offered major concessions to the Palestinians at Camp David. That Arafat could reject these concessions -- and bring down a pro-peace government in Israel -- probably convinced them of his irresponsibility. They will have been further convinced by his inability to control the current wave of suicide bombings.

But this view must be re-examined if there is to be any chance of peace. Oslo was already lost by the time of the Camp David meeting last summer. To put it as simply as possible, the formula was unworkable and unjust.

Oslo gave Palestinians full control over less than one-fifth of the land on the West Bank, and that only in fragments. Israeli settlements had expanded to the point where they were choking Palestinian life.

Instead of giving the new Palestinian structures of government space to breathe and develop into truly democratic institutions -- an absolute prerequisite if Palestinian 'extremists' were to be won over to peace -- Israel and the United States tried to turn the Palestinian Authority into a vast security apparatus. This resulted in grave human rights abuses, but it was never going to stifle all opposition to Israel in just five years.

Yet Israel continued the pressure: it tried to enforce the Oslo arrangement with an iron fist, by closing the territories and imposing collective punishment. This simply created more resentment and anger.

The fundamental problem with Oslo -- and the reason why it cannot be revived -- is that it was not a process between equals, but rather between occupied and occupier. Oslo never set itself the explicit goal of ending Israel's occupation or even declaring occupation to be illegal. As a result, the process of negotiation perpetuated -- and arguably accentuated -- the unequal nature of the relationship. Oslo gave a superficial impression of balance -- of two peace partners with equal power. But this was only an illusion.

This lesson must be fully absorbed before any new peace initiative is launched. It is clear and self-evident that there must be a cease-fire and a resumption of talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. That is essential. But any talks will have to take place between equals, and under international, not American, auspices. They will need to make a new start in a new location. The timetable will need to be open-ended and not contingent on U.S. (or Israeli)

domestic politics.

There will need to be some kind of international presence on the ground, to ensure protection for all civilians on both sides. That holds true for the Palestinian territories as it does for Kosovo, Sierra Leone, or Bosnia.

Finally, and most important, any peace process will have to accept as its goal the ending of occupation. That is an essential precondition for an equal partnership between Israelis and Palestinians.

This argument may not be palatable to those governments that have invested heavily in Oslo, but they should remember who is making it: people like Raji Sourani, founder and director of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights -- winner of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial award for human rights; or Eyad El Sarraj, founder and director of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) -- winner of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights. El Sarraj was so badly tortured by Palestinian security officials for speaking out that he needed treatment in Denmark.

People of this stature have earned the right to be heard. They speak the language of peace -- but a peace with justice. We ignore them at our peril.

In the News: Human Rights Lawyer Barred From Work (June 6, 2001)

Mahmoud Majahneh was today prevented by Israel troops from reaching the Democracy and Rights Center in Ramallah, where he works as a lawyer on cases involving the legal rights of Palestinian migrant workers.

According to a press release issued by the DWRC, Mr. Majahneh was stopped at an Israeli checkpoint. His Israeli ID card was seized. When Mr. Majahneh protested, one of the soldiers threatened to tear up his ID card.

The DWRC press release condemned Israel's total closure of the West Bank as a violation of the right to move and travel. 'As a matter of fact, the Palestinian Territories has been transformed into cantons, which makes it impossible to travel between the Palestinian cities, towns and the villages,' it said. (contact [DWRC](#))

Oslo Through the Eyes of Palestinian Civil Society

The 1987 uprising lasted into the early 1990s. Its depth and persistence put an end to any hope in Israel that the territories could be permanently annexed.

The Palestinian leadership also suffered a shock after publicly siding with Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War. This infuriated the Arab Gulf states, which withdrew their support from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The expulsion from Kuwait of 400,000 Palestinians, who had been sending home remittances, also weakened the budget of the intifada.

All this provided an opening for the United States to address what was now the major threat to security in the region -- namely the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation.

Under U.S. pressure, the PLO and Israel both agreed to attend a conference in Madrid, which took place on October 30, 1991. The discussions then moved to Washington, where they quickly got bogged down over Israel's refusal to talk directly to the PLO. Arafat also insisted that Israel accept that it was an occupying power -- a demand that Israel rejected.

Nonetheless, the ice had been broken and the Israeli opposition leader Yitzhak Rabin campaigned on a pledge to conclude a speedy agreement with the Palestinians if elected. After Rabin's election victory, a secret channel was opened between the Israelis and Palestinians in Norway. This led back to Washington, and on September 13, 1993, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin shook hands over a Declaration of Principles at the White House.

Under the Declaration, Israel and the PLO traded 'mutual recognition.' In other words, Israel recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians while the PLO accepted Israel's right to exist. They also agreed on an 'interim' phase, lasting five years, under which Israeli forces would withdraw from parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and make way for a Palestinian Authority.

It was agreed that once this interim phase was complete, the talks would move to a second phase and focus on the exceptionally difficult 'final status' issues, including refugees, settlements, and Jerusalem.

From Optimism to Hostility

Most Palestinians were optimistic when the Oslo accords were signed. The Democracy and Workers Rights Center (DWRC) in Ramallah, one of the eight groups profiled in this series, looked forward to an improvement in economic conditions:

'Following the signing of the Oslo Agreement in September 1993, public opinion surveys in the West Bank and Gaza Strip found that two-thirds of Palestinians had expectations of rapid economic growth and progress. It was hoped that with the support of the international community in general and the Palestinian and Israeli authorities in particular, the well-educated work force could turn in tandem with the private sector to achieve a significant improvement in the living standards.' [1]

Others, however, were concerned that Arafat had taken a momentous gamble and raised fundamental doubts about the illegality of Israel's occupation of the territories. Occupation had been declared illegal in UN Security Council Resolution 242 in 1967. In the years that followed, occupation was also condemned as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which protects the rights of civilians under occupation. The fundamental illegality of occupation had been an article of faith for Palestinians right up to Oslo. [2]

But Oslo seemed to be saying that the occupation was now up for negotiation -- implying that both sides would bargain and make concessions. That is certainly how Israelis, and much of the

world, saw it in 1993, and it worried many Palestinians. As early as April 25, 1994, a group of civic leaders issued a public statement warning that the Oslo accords threatened to 'legitimize' Israel's occupation and 'circumvent' the key UN resolutions 242 and 338. [3] The group included Raji Sourani, Mustafa Barghouthi, and Eyad El Sarraj, who today head three of the eight organizations profiled in this series.

Between September 1993 and Camp David in July 2000, Israel and the Palestinians signed a series of agreements aimed at implementing the interim phase of the Oslo accords. Israeli forces pulled out from Gaza and Jericho on May 4, 1994, and Arafat returned to his Gaza headquarters two months later to a rapturous welcome.

An agreement on August 29, 1994, gave Palestinians control over education, health, and culture, and a full interim agreement (also known as Oslo 2) was signed on September 28, 1995. Within three months, Israeli troops had left the main towns of the West Bank. [4] Elections to a Palestinian parliament took place in the spring of 1996.

But by now, the Oslo timetable was already behind schedule, and both sides had been deeply disillusioned, as well as traumatized, by a series of horrific terrorist incidents. These started with a deadly 1994 attack by an Israeli settler against a mosque in Hebron, which killed over 30 Palestinians. To the Palestinians, this was but one of many sacrilegious acts by Israelis against their holy places, and it probably helped to trigger a spate of deadly suicide and car bombings in Israel. These, in turn, provoked a deep malaise in Israel and led to the defeat of the Labour Party in elections.

Israel's new Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was deeply suspicious of the peace process. In the words of one BBC book, he 'saw no reason to be 'biggerhearted' in the implementation of Oslo. On the contrary, he took steps that killed Oslo and infuriated the Palestinians.' [5]

Nonetheless, on January 15 1997 Israel's Likud government and Palestinians signed a protocol that divided the city of Hebron into two parts. Under the agreement, Israel would retain full control over a fifth of Hebron while the remainder of the city would fall under the Palestinian Authority.

This was one of the major agreements to emerge from Oslo, but it also helped to explain why the process was -- by now -- deeply resented by many Palestinians. In the first place, it was reached under extreme duress: the United States came down very hard on the side of Israel. In the second place, it looked like an unreasonable concession to Israeli settlers. About 400 settlers lived in the part of Hebron that would fall under Israeli control, but so did 30,000 Palestinians (100,000 Palestinians lived in the rest of the town).

The next agreement to be signed was at Wye River on October 23, 1998. The Wye River memorandum was intended to breathe new life into the Oslo process and speed up the faltering timetable. It was also intended to give Palestinians about 10 percent more land. But Netanyahu set about trying to modify or nullify all of these agreements, and the process stalled again.

Israelis voted Netanyahu out of office on May 17, 1999, and replaced him with Ehud Barak.

Barak was hailed as deeply committed to peace, but for many Palestinians he came too late. The interim phase of Oslo had just expired on May 4, 1999, with most of the main goals unfulfilled.

On the Palestinian side, the structures set up under Oslo had run out of time and effectively lost legitimacy. Arafat had failed to adopt a 'basic law,' the equivalent of a constitution, and the legal term of the Palestinian Legislative Council (parliament) had expired on May 4, 1999 without elections being held. No elections had ever been held for the thousands of local councilors, who served at Arafat's pleasure. As the 1999 annual report of the Palestinian Human Rights Centre observed, this created a situation of 'legal anarchy.' [6]

A Question of Land

The larger failure concerned the relationship with Israel. Palestinians had expected tough bargaining when the Oslo process began in 1993, but no one could have expected that the next six years would reinforce Israel's occupation.

One example was land. The Oslo process divided the territories up into three separate categories. In the West Bank these were: Category A (full control by the Palestinians); Category B (civilian control by Palestinians, shared security control with Israel); Category C, which remained under full Israeli control. Gaza was also divided.

The main purpose of these internal boundaries was to allow Israel to withdraw from the populated centers while retaining control of the settlements, borders, and strategic resources like water. But by 1999 the Palestinian Authority had only taken over full control of 17.2 percent of territory on the West Bank and about 60 percent of the Gaza Strip. Another 23.8 percent of the West Bank was under the civilian but not security control of the Authority.

Moreover, the Palestinian land was not contiguous. It was divided up into enclaves that could easily be separated by a roadblock. Nor did the Oslo process give the Palestinian Authority sovereignty over the land that came under its control, internally or externally. The external borders, and all trade, remained under the control of Israel. Israeli military law remained the ultimate source of authority over the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip, including Category A.

Settlements: Magnets for Insecurity

Throughout the Oslo process, Israeli settlements were the most visible symbol of continuing Israeli occupation.

Ironically, the settlements grew rapidly in number during Barak's brief term in office, to the point where they now number over 190: 19 in the Gaza Strip; 175 on the West Bank. The settlements are inhabited by 380,000 settlers, with 180,000 settlers residing in East Jerusalem alone. Further, Israel has built 27 new settlements since the Wye River meeting. [7]

Our Palestinian hosts made it clear that this expansion is the single greatest cause of tension and insecurity in the occupied territories. Although the settlements are compact and occupy relatively little space in themselves, they reinforce the sense of being under occupation because they

occupy high ground and are joined together (and to Israel) by bypass roads that are for the exclusive use of Israelis.

This network of roads is forever expanding. As well as linking settlements, it meets the strategic objective of separating Palestinian territory into parcels that can be easily overcome and isolated in the event of a security crisis. One of the aims is presumably to create an East-West corridor across the territories that would ensure unimpeded access from Israel through Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and Jordanian border.

With each new settlement, more Palestinian land is confiscated, more Palestinian roads are blocked off, and more precious water is consumed: this delegation was told that each Israeli settler consumes on average 1,450 cubic meters of water a year, compared to the 60 cubic meters consumed by the average Palestinian.

The lack of contact between Palestinians and the settlers is remarkable. Palestinians see the settlers as classic colonizers. Many have been lured from far-off lands and have no apparent interest or sympathy for Palestinian culture. They lay claim to Palestinian land on the basis of ancient Jewish scriptures. From the Palestinian perspective, this is a predatory - and illegal - invasion.

Most serious, the settlements act as magnets for insecurity and violence from both sides. This appears clearly from the next issue of this series, which looks at the impact of a house demolition on one Palestinian family in Gaza.

There have certainly been many unpardonable acts of violence against Israeli settlers. But such acts are themselves often in retaliation for acts of violence by settlers, like the death of Naim Badran, the official from the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC), who was killed in his home in Ramallah by shelling from the Israeli settlement the day before we left.

These outrages are rarely reported in the international press, but they play a key role in triggering the tit-for-tat violence. If the Israelis and Palestinians had mounted a joint police operation to investigate some of the killings on both sides, they might have done something to halt the escalation. Instead, both sides have turned a blind eye -- and given tacit encouragement to the killers.

Human Rights and Closure

From the perspective of Palestinian human rights monitors, the Oslo peace process did not lead to any appreciable diminution of abuse by Israel's forces of occupation. An estimated 700 Palestinian homes were demolished between 1993 and 1998. (The psychological impact of a house demolition is examined in the next issue of this series.) Over 1,600 Palestinians remained in Israeli jails at the end of the year. [8]

Throughout this period, Israel also employed a policy that came to be known as 'closure.' This could involve restricting the movement of goods and labor between the West Bank and Israel, and the West Bank and Gaza. Or it could involve the total closure - - or banning of any

movement -- before or after a terrorist attack in Israel. Yet another variant -- 'internal closure' -- was used to restrict the movement between towns within the West Bank itself.

The policy of closure was first used by Israel in March 1993 and was repeatedly employed throughout the Oslo process. Between 1994 and 1999, there were 443 days of closure. Closure has, of course, been very widely used during the current uprising. (Israel forces started digging trenches around the town of Ramallah shortly after this delegation left in February.)

The reason why closure is so bitterly resented is that it is indiscriminate -- effectively punishing the entire Palestinian population. The economic impact of closure was felt repeatedly during the Oslo years. In 1996, closure resulted in losses that amounted to 39.6 percent of Gaza's entire GNP. It also left Palestinian workers in Israel completely exposed and vulnerable: from one day to the next they could find themselves out of work.

According to the DWRC, closure has also made it easier for Israeli employers to exploit and discriminate against Palestinian workers, particularly those working illegally. [9] This was one more example of how the Oslo process, had in the eyes of Palestinian civil society, increased their vulnerability to the Israeli occupation. The territories had become gradually more and more dependent on Israel's economy between 1967 and 1993. By turning the territories into enclaves, Oslo had made it much easier to strangle them economically.

Writing in the 'New York Times Review of Books' in April 2000, Edward Said spoke for many Palestinians when he described Oslo as 'an expedient and foolish gamble that has already done far more harm than good.' [10]

Camp David

The peace process culminated in one final spectacular failure when, in July 2000, U.S. President Bill Clinton tried to broker a deal on the difficult final status issues.

This was, to say the very least, a huge gamble. The interim phase of Oslo was meant to be the easy part, but even this had proved to be a failure -- at least from the Palestinian perspective. Final status issues were infinitely more difficult, which is why they had been postponed. They would now be much harder because the interim process had clearly not generated confidence on both sides. Nonetheless, the clock was ticking for Bill Clinton's presidency, and Clinton had confidence in his ability to win over Arafat and Barak.

Arafat himself was opposed to holding a summit without a good deal of preparation. He was under tremendous pressure at home. The Palestinian refugees were particularly worried that he might come under irresistible pressure from the United States and Israel to surrender their right to return in exchange for more 'autonomy,' and in June a refugee delegation presented an urgent appeal to the Authority demanding a firm line on their rights at the Camp David summit.

To the Palestinians, this was another strong argument for taking more time and preparing public opinion for a summit on the final status issues. Arafat urged the Americans to hold preparatory meetings first. But there was no resisting the U.S. pressure. [11]

Three of the most difficult final status issues were settlements, Jerusalem, and refugees. According to published reports in the Israeli paper Ha'aretz, the United States set out a plan that attempted to meet both sides half way.

The U.S. plan was never made public, but according to Ha'aretz it called for Israel to withdraw from 95 percent of the West Bank. In return Israel would annex the remaining 5 percent. Palestinians would exercise broad civilian autonomy over the Old City of Jerusalem, while Israel would retain security control. There would be freedom of religion and free movement for all worshippers in Jerusalem. On the refugees, Israel would recognize the suffering of the refugees and take in 'tens of thousands' as family unification cases. Half a million refugees would be assimilated by the new Palestinian state.

The U.S. plan appears to have formed the basis for the negotiations. Whatever their misgivings, Barak and Arafat certainly took it seriously and appear to have made serious concessions.

On Israel's side, it was reported that Israel was indeed prepared to withdraw from 95 percent of the West Bank and to leave almost all of Gaza. Barak also demanded that Israel annex the remaining 5 percent where about 80 percent of the settlers lived. Israel insisted on full sovereignty over Jerusalem and also wanted the expansion of municipal Jerusalem. Finally, Israel reportedly offered a one-time family reunification of 100,000 refugees, and the creation of an international body to compensate the 1948 refugees.

Arafat was reported as being ready to accept Israel's annexation of the large settlement blocs -- a signal concession. However, he insisted on Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem, and rejected the U.S. suggestions for shared administration and free access. Arafat was also adamant on the right of return for the 1948 refugees. [12]

The Post Mortem

After the Camp David summit collapsed, many blamed Arafat for refusing to grasp the nettle and strike a deal that would have brought peace to his people after 50 years of war. Israel's offer to withdraw from 95 percent of the West Bank struck Israelis -- and much of the world -- as an astonishing concession. To this day, some columnists still hold this as an example of Israel's flexibility and of Palestinian intransigence.

In fact, the figure of 95 percent was misleading because it excluded the area of 'Greater Jerusalem,' which accounts for roughly a quarter of the entire West Bank land area. But the deeper problem for Arafat was that his constituency in Palestine was by now deeply hostile to the Oslo accords.

Raji Sourani, from the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, summed it up as follows: 'This has become a situation leading nowhere. Some time ago, Israel had a choice between divorce or marriage. Israel chose divorce, represented by the two-state option, in order to preserve the Jewish nature of the state of Israel. But the most basic requirement of the two-state option is that

the Palestinian people have their own state. This minimal requirement has yet to be fulfilled. Instead all we have are fragmented Bantustans of Palestinian control, with the Israeli military occupation continuing over the Palestinian Territories as a whole.' [13]

Looking back, many concluded that the entire approach had been misconceived from the start. Hanan Ashrawi, one of the most prominent Palestinian leaders and a former member of Arafat's cabinet, felt that Arafat's mistake had been to 'sign now and negotiate later.'

Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, president of the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC), concluded that instead of moving Palestinians from occupation to liberation and independence, Oslo had created 'a stage called limited self government within the context of the continuing old occupation.' This, he wrote, had brought innumerable new contradictions and problems. [14]

In all likelihood, Arafat could not have signed Camp David and survived politically. There was simply too much hostility to the Oslo process among Palestinians.

Sharon's Provocation

Two months after Camp David, on September 28, Ariel Sharon, the leader of the Israeli opposition coalition, visited the site of the Al-Aqsa mosque in East Jerusalem. Known as Al-Harem al-Sharif to Arabs and the Temple Mount to Israelis, the site marks the spot where the prophet Mohamed is said to have ascended to heaven. Surrounded by armed police and reporters, Sharon approached to within yards of the mosque.

This crude reassertion of Israel's sovereignty over Jerusalem came at a critical moment in the Israeli election campaign. Sharon's opponent, Ehud Barak, had been badly hurt by the perception that he had offered major concessions to the Palestinians at Camp David and had still been rebuffed. Sharon's visit to the Al-Harem al-Sharif was a clear statement -- under his leadership there would be no more Israeli concessions to the Palestinians.

But the gesture provoked fury from the Palestinians, who demonstrated the following day in Jerusalem. Israeli security forces responded by killing four Palestinians and injuring 200, even though there were no reports of gunfire from the demonstrators. This unleashed a wave of protests throughout the occupied territories that has come to be known as the Al-Aqsa intifada (uprising). The man who triggered it all -- Ariel Sharon -- was rewarded with a landslide victory in the Israeli election earlier this year.

Coming so soon after the Camp David collapse, it was perhaps hardly surprising that both sides reacted as they did.

To the Palestinians, Sharon's visit was the final straw -- the last in a long string of snubs and humiliations that had masqueraded as a peace process. As the UN's special inquiry commission concluded: 'The Palestinians see the second intifada essentially from the outlook of an occupied people, as a spontaneous eruption of pent-up hostile sentiment arising from years of frustration, disappointment and humiliation.' [15]

Declaration of War

For their part, Israelis felt that Camp David had come tantalizingly close to closing the deal, and they blamed Arafat for failing to show leadership in grasping the nettle. A special UN commission of inquiry was told by senior Israeli officials that they felt Arafat engineered the September uprising to cover for his failure of nerve at Camp David. The Israeli peace movement also felt it had been betrayed by Arafat and had little sympathy for the Palestinians when they cried foul at Israel's tough response to the intifada. The United States, too, felt it had invested hugely in Camp David and felt angry and snubbed.

Israel treated the Palestinian uprising like a declaration of war. In the chilling words of the UN commission of inquiry, 'according to this dominant Israeli perspective, the encounter with the Palestinians has moved from a relationship between an occupying power and an occupied people, to one between conflicting parties in a state of war, implying a virtual absence of legal and moral constraints, at least on the Israeli side.' [16]

This lack of restraint has shown itself in many forms. From the first day, Israeli forces employed live ammunition against protesters, in clear violation of Israel's own so-called 'Open Fire Regulations' that govern the use of lethal force. These regulations state clearly that live ammunition should only be used when there is a threat to life and only against those who constitute the threat.

In a recent report, B'Tselem, the Israeli center that monitors human rights in the Occupied Territories, analyzed the location and circumstances of Palestinian deaths during the first two months of the uprising. It found that Israel's security forces had routinely ignored the regulations. [17]

One thing has also become ominously clear: the 'bantustanization,' of the Palestinian territories that occurred under Oslo has left them terribly vulnerable to the kind of measures that Israel now employs. According to one Palestinian research center, the Health, Development, Information and Policy Institute, the West Bank has been divided up into no fewer than 64 clusters of territory during the current uprising. By cutting them off from each other and from the outside world, Israel has created an instant and overwhelming economic crisis.

This, coupled with the lack of restraint shown by Israeli forces in dealing with protests, has made the current uprising infinitely more damaging and violent than the uprising of 1987. This in turn has greatly increased the task that faces civil society -- a fact that emerges repeatedly in the following profiles.

The Oslo documents, together with an account of the Oslo peace process, can be found on the website of the [US Embassy in Tel Aviv](#).

[1] 'The Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the Palestinian People in West Bank and Gaza

Strip,' DWRC Research and Studies Unit (June 2000), p. 3.

[2] The Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) seeks to protect civilians who are occupied in war. The Convention views occupation as a temporary state and prohibits any attempts to alter the character of the occupied territory. By annexing East Jerusalem and building settlements, Israel has clearly contravened the Convention. Israel has always maintained that the Convention does not apply to the territories because Jordan and Egypt were not 'residual sovereign powers' in the territories prior to the 1967 war. But the international community has rejected this interpretation, including most recently the three-person commission of inquiry that was sent to the region in February by the UN's Human Rights Commission. (UN reference: E/CN.4/2001/121, March 16, 2001.)

[3] 'Israeli-Palestinian Agreement Legitimizes the Israeli Occupation.' The group was headed by Dr. Abdel Shafi, who had chaired the Palestinian delegation at Madrid. It was published in 'News from Within' (April 1994), pp. 15-17.

[4] Under the Oslo accords, this was the only 'withdrawal' of Israeli forces. All other movements were termed 'redeployments.'

[5] Ahron Bregman and Jihan El-Tahri, 'The Fifty Years War - Israel and the Arabs' (London: Penguin and BBC Books, 1998), p. 273.

[6] Annual Report of the Palestinian Human Rights Centre, p. 11.

[7] Figures from the Health, Development, Information, and Policy Institute ([HDIP](#)), Ramallah.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[9] 'Effects of the Israeli Closure Policy on Palestinian Workers,' (DWRC), p. 27.

[10] 'The End of the Peace Process,' New York Times Review of Books, April 20, 2000.

[11] Arafat's own doubts were mentioned in a series of articles by Akram Hanieh, 'The Camp David Papers,' which were published in August 2000 by the newspaper Al-Ayyam ([e-mail](#)).

[12] These details are taken from the 20001 diary of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs ([PASSIA](#)), p. 279.

[13] This is taken from Sourani's interview with Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, in 'Speak Truth to Power,' the book that honors human rights defenders who have won the Robert F. Kennedy human rights award. The full profile of Sourani and the other defenders can be found on the [website](#).

[14] Mustafa Barghouthi, 'The Post-Oslo Impasse,' Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine Special Report No. 10, Summer 1998.

[15] Report of the human rights inquiry commission established by the UN Human Rights Commission on 19 October 2000, p. 6. See above, note 2

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[17] B'Tselem - the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 'Illusions of Restraint,' Information Sheet, December 2000. See [website](#).