

ISRAEL'S SECURITY FENCE WILL VIOLATE PALESTINIAN RIGHTS AND WEAKEN ISRAEL'S SECURITY, ARGUES ISRAELI HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

AdvocacyNet

News Bulletin 16, November 6, 2003

Washington DC, November 12, 2003: Israel's "separation barrier" will violate the rights of 210,000 Palestinians and will not provide Israelis with guaranteed protection from Palestinian suicide bombers, according to researchers from B'Tselem, the Jerusalem-based Israeli human rights monitoring group.

Speaking recently at a meeting of the Georgetown human rights forum in Washington DC, Jessica Montell, the Director of B'Tselem, and Yezekhel Lein, a senior researcher, said the separation barrier appears to be aimed at reinforcing Israeli settlements and creating further obstacles to any peace process, rather than keeping Palestinian militants out of Israel. The forum is jointly sponsored by the Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM), from Georgetown University, and the Advocacy Project (AP).

Ms. Montell pointed out that the route of the barrier will take it well inside the so-called "Green Line," which separates Israel from the territories occupied in the 1967 war. As a result, it will leave [over 115,000](#) Palestinians living on the Israeli side of the barrier, as well as [210,000](#) Palestinians in East Jerusalem, which Israel considers to be part of Israel. This makes nonsense of the claim that the barrier is aimed at preventing Palestinians from entering Israel, she said.

In addition, said Ms. Montell, the barrier will split off [185,000](#) acres of land, including some of the richest agricultural land on the West Bank, and isolate entire Palestinian communities. This, she said, will create resentment and further impoverishment. 60% of all Palestinians already live below the poverty level. "How will Palestinian life be viable?" asked Ms. Montell. "When I first saw the barrier I was filled with dread."

Ms. Montell called for construction on the wall to be halted, and said that this would probably only happen as a result of pressure from the US government. If Israeli is sincere about wanting to control the influx of terrorists, she said, it should deploy more troops along the Green Line instead of sending them to protect settlements. If a barrier has to be built, at least let it be along the 1967 border. "It is still not too late."

Construction on the barrier began in June [2002](#), following a rash of suicide bombings, and Israel's incursion into the West Bank cities (Operation 'Defensive Shield'). The barrier is between 60 and 100 meters wide. [The barrier](#) takes the form of [a concrete wall](#) along approximately 10 kilometers of its route. [Along the](#) rest, it is a combination of electronic and barbed wire fences, trenches, and service, patrol, trace and armored vehicle roads.

According to Ms. Montell and Mr. Lein, the barrier is being constructed in stages. Stage 1 has been nearly completed and stretches over 78 miles through the West Bank, while an additional 28 miles are to be completed by the end of this year. An [additional](#) stage, known as the “Jerusalem Envelope,” is comprised of another 43 miles, of which 12 miles have already been completed.

In October, the Israeli government approved Stages 3 and 4, comprising another 150 miles of barrier through the West Bank. It is currently considering a “Jordan Valley barrier” that would stretch through the east of Israel, many miles east of the Green Line. The total estimated cost of the approved stages is \$1.5 billion, making it, in Ms. Montell’s words, “easily the largest infrastructural project in Israel’s history.”

Ms Montell said that a total of 210,000 Palestinians will be directly harmed by the first stage of the barrier [alone](#). She said their human rights were being infringed in four key areas:

* **Freedom of movement:** The barrier isolates 13 communities from the West Bank. In order to pass through, Palestinians must obtain a permit to pass through one of some 30 agricultural gates which are open two to three times a day for a short period of time and closed during security alarms. Some communities, like the town of Qalqilya are completely walled-off. Those who live in such enclaves can leave through nine main gates. However, permits are very difficult to obtain, as the permit offices have been closed for many weeks. The restrictions will make it exceptionally difficult for farmers to move and market their goods, and the result could be devastating for the coming olive harvest. Over 72,200 people in 36 communities have been separated from their farmland.

* **The Right to Work:** The barrier prevents thousands of Palestinians from working their farm lands, which Ms. Montell described as the “bread basket of the West Bank,” or from reaching their jobs.

* **The Right to Health:** Many of the isolated villages lack their own health facilities, such as clinics, and are dependant on hospitals which they can no longer reach easily.

* **The Right to Education:** Students and teachers are unable to get to schools, without going many miles out of their way to attempt to pass through the barrier.

Ms. Montell used a detailed powerpoint presentation to show that the real intention of the barrier is to reinforce and insulate Israeli settlements, (which are illegal according to international law). She cited the case of the Palestinian town of Qalqilya, which was originally intended to remain open to the West Bank. After a nearby settlement argued successfully for a direct link to Israel, the barrier was re-routed to enclose Qalqilya completely. The barrier has also been built to preserve antiquities and to ensure access to Israeli holy sites like Rachel’s Tomb. It was even built around a field of iris flowers.

Several in the audience expressed sympathy for Israel’s security dilemma, but B’Tselem’s message is that the specific route chosen for the barrier may worsen, not

improve, Israel's security. In the short term, the barrier has created such resentment that Palestinians are refusing to even claim compensation for their losses, in order not to seem to legitimize the process. Many feel the barrier can only create more potential suicide bombers. One recent suicide bomber from the Palestinian town of Jenin managed to pass through the barrier and penetrate into Haifa.

"There is no security logic behind this," said Ms. Montell. "The barrier won't protect us." Mr. Lein agreed. "How does making life harsher for Palestinians improve security for Israel?" he asked.

In the long term, the barrier will weaken international recognition of the Green Line and, in the words of Mr. Lein, "create new facts on the ground which will have to be negotiated away in any future peace process." It will also eat away at the borders of a Palestinian state, which were agreed during the Oslo peace process. All this undermines the prospects for peace and for an independent Palestinian state – which ultimately is Israel's best hope for peace with the Palestinians.

Because the barrier is Israel's largest public works project, the B'Tselem team rejected the government's position that the barrier is a temporary solution. Instead, they said, it is being built in exactly the same way as the settlements – through seizure orders of 3 to 5 years. Many of the settlements now have the look of permanence.

Recent polls in Israel have shown that as many as 80% of Israelis support the barrier. But, said Mr. Lein, this is largely as a result of ignorance. He said that there had been an "alarming" lack of public debate or disclosure about the barrier or its implications. In spite of the enormous cost "most Israelis don't know or don't care."

Ms. Montell and Mr. Lein both insisted that there are alternatives, which Israel has the obligation to examine.

* For the April 2003 B'Tselem briefing paper "Behind The Barrier: Human Rights Violations As a Result of Israel's Separation Barrier" visit: <http://www.btselem.org/>

* For a Palestinian view of the barrier visit: <http://www.miftah.org/Doc/Reports/WallReport.pdf>