

NEW ISRAELI BARRIER SEEKS TO CIRCUMVENT SUPREME COURT RULING, CLAIM ADVOCATES

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Jerusalem and Washington, DC: The Israeli army has built an "inner" barrier in the southern Hebron hills of the West Bank in an attempt to circumvent a major ruling by the Israeli Supreme Court and prevent Palestinian villagers from using agricultural land, according to Israeli and Palestinian advocates.

Activists from Ta'ayush, a joint Arab-Jewish nonviolent action organization, joined forces on June 24 at the Palestinian village of Imneizel, to protest the barrier. Their action was reported by Sarah Sachs at the Alternative Information Center (AIC), a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP).

AIC provides information, support and publicity to organizations that promote Israeli and Palestinian cooperation. Ms. Sachs is working with AIC this summer as an AP intern.

Like many similar actions in the Palestinian Territories, the Ta'ayush protest did not receive media attention. "The mainstream media is lazy in its portrayal of the Occupation, preferring to focus on the most dramatic stories from Israel/Palestine," such as the Separation Wall, said a spokeswoman from AIC. "But it is the little, often 'unseen' cruelties of the Occupation, such as the inner barrier, that compound and make people's daily lives unbearable."

The Hebron barrier is built of cement to a height of 32 inches (82 centimeters) and runs 25 miles (41 kilometers). This sets it apart from the larger Separation Wall - the series of high fences with checkpoints being built around the West Bank.

The barrier is low enough for people to hop over, but its impact is severe. It prevents more than 3,000 Palestinian villagers in the southern Hebron hills from bringing their sheep and farming equipment to grazing pastures and water. The barrier also forces older people, who are unable to climb over, to walk several miles in order to collect water, visit family or receive medical attention.

All of this has been especially hard on the villagers because of a summer drought. The barrier also prevents access to roads and to the nearby town of Yatta.

Imneizel is one of several towns affected. According to the protestors, the villagers have attempted to use cisterns on the other side of the barrier, but have been harassed - and hit with stones - by Israeli settlers who have expanded their settlements to illegally annex about 20,000 acres of Palestinian land in the area. The settlers receive government-funded water pumps and do not use the cisterns.

The protestors constructed a makeshift ramp across the barrier made from stones on the ground, and released a herd of sheep onto the pastures on the other side - an act that one observer described as "nonviolent action at its best." Earlier the same day Palestinian villagers had tried to bulldoze the wall, until they were deterred by the threat of tear gas from Israeli military patrolling the area.

According to reports, the local Israeli commander promised to build a gate through the barrier within three days. The gate never materialized and new protests are planned.

Israeli and Palestinian advocates view the barrier as an attempt to circumvent a major ruling by the Israeli Supreme Court, which called in February 2005 for the Separation Wall to be pushed back toward the Green Line, or 1949 armistice line, so as to lessen the impact on Palestinian residents. The inner barrier follows the original route of the Separation Wall in the Hebron region.

AIC is a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization with offices in the Palestinian town of Beit Sahour and Jerusalem. AIC hosts lectures and shows documentaries in its West Bank office, and has recently started arranging cultural events and organizing local groups to clear trash from Solomon's Pools in Bethlehem.

- Visit [AIC's partner page](#)
- For Ta'ayush, visit [their website](#).
- For a map of the West Bank, go [here](#).
- Read [Sarah Sachs' blog](#) from Jerusalem.
- Read [an article on this issue](#)