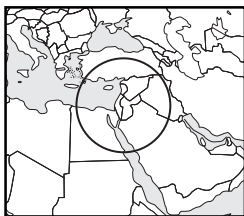


A humanitarian crisis

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Palestinian social development deteriorated significantly in 2001 into what is now a humanitarian crisis. Until measures are taken that impel Israel to desist in its military policies of siege, economic strangulation and assault against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, the crisis will continue.

Israeli occupation forces and settlers have killed 934 Palestinians since September 2000 and 602 Palestinians in 2001. In the same period, Israeli forces injured fully one per cent of the entire Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza (WBG).¹ Throughout 2001, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and the Palestinian people struggled to maintain the level of social development in the Occupied Territories despite Israeli siege and assault. The PNA, working in conjunction with individual Palestinians, have slowed the inevitable slide into what is now a humanitarian crisis brought on by Israeli occupation forces. Palestinian social development deteriorated significantly in 2001. Until measures are taken that impel Israel to desist in its military policies of siege, economic strangulation and assault against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, the decline in Palestinian social development will continue.

The impact of the siege on Palestinian social development

Shortly after the beginning of the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, the Israeli army moved against the civilian population in the WBG. Israeli military forces upgraded their closure of Palestinian areas, imposed since 1996, to a self-described policy of "siege." The Israeli siege of WBG has continued unabated, splitting Palestinian territory into 130 isolated pockets of land and denying freedom of movement both inside and between the WBG, between the WBG and other countries, and between the West Bank and Jerusalem, the economic heart of Palestine.² In a recent report, the United Nations Special Coordinator's Office (UNSCO) argued that the siege is "a form of collective punishment for the Palestinian population [that] cannot be sustained because of security considerations."³

The Palestinian economy has suffered under the Israeli siege. The economic production came to a standstill in 2001 and, by the end of year, 50% of the Palestinian population was below the poverty line, an increase of nearly 100% since September 2000.⁴ Palestinian real GDP declined by 12% in 2001

and 19% since September 2000. Gross National Income (GNI) losses as a result of Israeli closure reached USD 2.4 billion by the end of 2001.

Unemployment had risen to 28%,⁵ although World Bank estimates place it at 33% in June 2001 with the addition of natural population growth.⁶ A recent survey of household incomes by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in July and August 2001 indicated that 10.1% of West Bank households had lost all sources of income since September 2000 and 47.7% report a loss of over 50% of their usual income since the beginning of the uprising.⁷

Israeli closure has severely hampered access of Palestinians to health care. In Gaza, 62.5% of households report "they have faced problems [accessing] health resources due to Israeli closure."⁸ Palestinian health conditions are exacerbated by the physical aggravation of patients in vehicles forced to take off-road transport to hospitals, increased costs of medical transport, increased time getting patients to treatment, and poor checkpoint management by the Israeli military.⁹ By November 2001, the Palestine Red Crescent Society reported 274 instances in which their ambulances were denied access to Palestinian areas and 163 attacks against their fleet of 85 ambulances. Hospitals have come under Israeli gunfire, and movement restriction has caused deaths at checkpoints.¹⁰ Medical goods are in short supply and access is often denied at Israeli checkpoints. Israeli closures have also significantly reduced Palestinian access to safe water resources.¹¹ In a February 2001 press release, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stated, "There have...been incidents where vital medical assistance was denied, or delayed, thereby causing serious aggravations of individual medical conditions."¹²

5 Bocco, R., M. Brunner and J. Rabah, "International and Local Aid during the second Intifada," Graduate Institute of Development Studies: University of Geneva, report done in collaboration with the Jerusalem Media & Communication Centre (JMCC), July 2001.

6 Figures on GDP, GNI and unemployment are from World Bank Draft Report "One Year of Intifada - The Palestinian Economy in Crisis," World Bank, November 2001.

7 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Impact of the Israeli Measures on the Economic Conditions of Palestinian Households (3rd Round: July-August, 2001)" PCBS, 2001, p. 5. Available at <http://www.pcbs.org>.

8 *Ibid.*

9 B'Tselem: the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, "No Way Out: Medical Implications of Israel's Siege Policy," B'Tselem: Jerusalem, June 2001.

10 Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC) "Healthcare Under Siege II: The Health Situation of Palestinians During the First four months of the Intifada (28 September 2000-28 January 2001)", p. 12. See www.upmrc.org.

11 B'Tselem, "Not Even a Drop: The Water Crisis in Palestinian Villages Without a Water Network," B'Tselem: Jerusalem, 2001, p. 6.

12 ICRC Press Release, 26 February 2001.

1 See http://www.palestinemonitor.org/factsheet/Palestinian_killed_fact_sheet.htm. Information made available from ongoing monitoring by the Health Development Information and Policy Institute (HDIP) is also available through <http://www.hdip.org>.

2 Freedom of movement here includes both personal movement and movement of goods.

3 Collective punishment is outlawed by the 4th Geneva Convention Article 33, which states, "Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited." Quote taken from UNSCO "UNSCO Closure Update Summary: Impact on the Palestinian Economy of Confrontation, Border Closures and Mobility Restrictions, 1 October to 30 June 2001," 2001, p. 2.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 1. Figure is an UNSCO estimate from late in 2001.

The Israeli siege severely hampers the access of Palestinian children and youth to education. By July 2001, the siege had “prevented 10% to 90% of teachers from reaching educational institutions.”¹³ Israeli shelling since September 2001 has damaged over 400 Palestinian schools, or over 22% of all primary and secondary schools in WBG.¹⁴ Over 542,000 Palestinian students have been denied access to schooling in 2001.¹⁵ By July 2001, 90 students had been killed, at least 2151 shot and injured, and 76 had been arrested indefinitely.¹⁶ A November 2001 policy paper by the Bisan Center for Research and Development stated “All Palestinian youth are subject to the closures, which restrict the movement of teachers, students, and administrators, as well as the distribution of teaching and learning materials, regardless of their social position or physical location.”¹⁷

The impacts of the Israeli siege are especially difficult for disenfranchised groups. Nearly a third of those killed by the Israeli army and settlers are under the age of 18.¹⁸ According to the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP), many Palestinian children suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) including symptoms like isolation, stomach pains, bedwetting, aggression, sleeping disorders, headaches and eating disorders.¹⁹ As a result of increasing unemployment and lack of access of male workers to Israeli labour markets, the burden of economic production and support of the family has fallen on the shoulders of women. The combination of traditional patriarchal norms with the overall absence of Palestinian men—be it through work overseas, imprisonment or unemployment—leads Palestinian women to suffer the brunt of poverty and responsibility over the household.²⁰ Besides worrying over their children, women suffer increased domestic violence.²¹

The Palestinian response

Amid a chorus of Israeli complaints that the Palestinian National Authority is “not doing enough,” Israel has done everything in its power to undermine the ability of the PNA to act. This has included hundreds of invasions into Palestinian controlled areas, the wholesale destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, and the re-occupation of many areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip that were under PNA control as a result of agreements reached since the 1993 Oslo Accords.

Given the PNA crisis of income²² due to frozen tax receipts and the destruction of PNA infrastructure²³ and ability to act, the responses of the PNA

in 2001 to Israeli attacks on social development have been laudable. In November 2001, the World Bank stated, “Faced by unenviable alternatives, the PA’s overall fiscal management response has been sound.”

In the health sector, the Ministry of Health (MOH) has responded to financial difficulties on the part of patients by reducing or waiving fees. Because of lack of mobility, the MOH implemented a strategy of “decentralisation” whereby local health clinics were given additional authority. In addition, the MOH worked to increase medical funding through both PNA clinics and NGO clinics. Strategies employed by the MOH to confront the health crisis included the purchasing of drugs on credit from local suppliers, coordination of medical efforts with national and international NGOs, the promotion of home care, and the development of mobile health teams.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has worked to prop up the ailing educational sector. At the beginning of 2001, the MOE developed a Committee for Emergencies along with an Emergency Plan to disburse USD 13 million to cover operating costs, rehabilitation of schools, counseling and remedial education, first aid and fire equipment for schools. In addition, the MOE worked in conjunction with municipalities and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to decentralise school authority and reorganise students and teachers across districts in response to the siege. In response to the inability of schools to cover costs, many teachers have worked through 2001 with reduced wages in order to keep schools open.

The response of everyday Palestinians to the crisis has also been significant. A Birzeit University study found that more than 80% of households used expenditure reduction as a means of coping with the economic crisis.²⁴ More than half the population delayed or refinanced payments of debts and liabilities.²⁵ Other household coping strategies included reducing consumption, intensification of household production, selling of assets, borrowing to pay for expenditures and refinancing of existing loans.²⁶ Other reactions to the crisis include a re-introduction of agricultural production to prop up food stores and the sending of relatives overseas to work for remittances.²⁷

The international community must act

Social development is under attack in the Palestinian Territories. With the refocusing of world attention on terrorism following the September 11 attacks, the PNA has come under increasing global pressure to curb Palestinian militants. Yet in the face of this pressure, the PNA and the Palestinian people have suffered Israeli military and economic onslaught for 15 months. Promoting social development in Palestine requires action on the part of those who have the most significant impact on social development in Palestine. Israeli actions since the beginning of 2001 have clearly illustrated Israel’s power to determine and destroy social development in Palestine. For the current crisis in Palestinian social development to subside, the international community must recognise Israeli state violence against Palestinian civilians. Intermediate measures should include the deployment of an international protection force for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. A viable, prosperous and sovereign state in the Occupied Territories is necessary to improve social development in Palestine. ■

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13 Dima Al-Samman, head of the Media Department at the Ministry of Education as quoted in a Palestine Media Center Press Release, 16 July 2001.

14 World Bank Draft Report, *op.cit.* footnote 6, p. 48.

15 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. See www.pcbs.org.

16 Palestine Media Center Press Release, “The Impact of Israeli Aggression on Palestinian Education,” 16 July 2001.

17 Bisan Center for Research and Development, “Draft Youth Issues Policy Paper: Ramallah-Al-Bireh District,” submitted to TAMKEEN: Civil Society and Democracy Strengthening Project: Ramallah, November 2001.

18 See www.palestinemonitor.org/factsheet/Palestinian_killed_fact_sheet.htm.

19 Fecci, J., “The Al-Aqsa Intifada: The Unseen Consequences of Violence on Palestinian Women and Children,” Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, February 2001. See www.washington-report.org/backissues/010201/0101009.html.

20 Giacaman *et al.* “For the Common Good?: Gender and Social Citizenship in Palestine in S. Joseph and S. Slyomovics” eds. *Women and Power in the Middle East*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2001, p. 129.

21 Fecci, J., *op. cit.*

22 Since December 2000, the Israeli government has frozen tax receipts to the PNA. As a result, the Palestinian Authority faced a 76% decline in revenues between the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001. World Bank Draft Report, *op. cit.* footnote 6, p. 25.

23 A remarkable example is the invasion and trashing of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics by the Israeli Army on 5-6 December 2001. See www.pcbs.org.

24 Birzeit University, “Public Opinion Poll 3,” February 2001.

25 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) Survey, July 2001. See www.pcbs.org.

26 UNSCO, “Report on the Palestinian Economy,” Spring 2001, p. 29.

27 World Bank Draft Report, *op.cit.* footnote 6, p. 40.