

Restricted Movement in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Control of Palestinian movement has been a feature of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory since its inception in 1967. However, over the last 14 years the draconian system of movement controls used by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory has become increasingly institutionalized and restrictive. The permit system put in place in the early 1990s which requires that all Palestinians obtain military issued permits to move between the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem or to travel abroad is now complemented by a permanent system of roadblocks, gates, checkpoints, the Wall and other obstacles to movement in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza blockade.

Taken together all of these factors contribute to forced displacement, severely limit Palestinian access to basic resources including land and water and basic services including health care and education, and perpetuate a system of segregation and legal and structural inequality between Palestinians and Israelis. Understanding how Palestinian's freedom of movement is restricted is important to understanding the severe impact of Israel's occupation on average Palestinians.

This paper provides background information on how Israel has restricted Palestinian movement and the impact that these restrictions have on Palestinians lives.

When did Israel first begin restricting Palestinian movement?

Control over Palestinian movement has been a feature of the conflict since 1948. Following the 1948 War Israel incorporated into its own laws the [Defense \(Emergency\) Regulations](#) imposed by the British Mandate Authorities in 1945.^[i] These regulations were used to restrict the rights of Palestinians inside post 1948 Israel, most notably their freedom of movement which was controlled by permit requirements and curfews. In 1966 most of the restrictions imposed by Israel over Palestinian citizens of Israel under these regulations were lifted, but the regulations themselves remained in place. After the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 the Defense (Emergency) Regulations were incorporated into the military laws used by Israel to administer the occupied Palestinian territory.

From 1967 to 1972 the occupied Palestinian territory was declared a closed military area by the Israeli military and many freedoms including the freedom of movement by residents were severely limited. In 1972 the Israeli military issued a general exit order which allowed Palestinian to enter Israel from the West Bank and Gaza during daylight hours with few limitations. During this period Palestinians could also travel with relative freedom between the West Bank and Gaza.

Some limits were imposed on the general exit permit during the first Intifada, and following the start of the first Iraq war in 1991 the general exit permit was revoked and a general closure was declared over the occupied Palestinian territory. This was when Israel started requiring that all Palestinians acquire military issued permits if they wanted to enter Israel or move between the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. This permit regime was formalized as a part of the Oslo Accords and Palestinian movement into and out of Israel and between the different parts of the occupied Palestinian territory remains restricted to those Palestinians who have received travel permits from the Israeli military.

The Oslo Accords also resulted in new limitations on movement within the occupied Palestinian territory. Under the Oslo Accords the West Bank was divided into three administrative areas (A,B, and C). Area C, which comprises 61 percent of the West Bank, is under the full control of Israel through the Civil (Military) Administration in the West

Bank. Area B, 22% of the West Bank, is under the full administrative control of the Palestinian Authority but under the military control of Israel. Area A makes up 17% of the West Bank and is under full Palestinian control. Even before the start of the Second Intifada in September 2000 this division resulted in the imposition of movement restrictions between communities and between administrative areas inside the West Bank which were enforced through the imposition of mobile checkpoints.

After the start of the second intifada Israel intensified the general closure in place over the occupied Palestinian territory, more closely regulating travel by Palestinians and formalizing an internal system of movement restrictions through permanent checkpoints, roadblocks, gates, closed roads, barriers, and the Wall. This system which remains in place is addressed in more detail below.

Restrictions in place over Gaza were also further tightened in 2005 when Israel unilaterally withdrew its settlers and redeployed its troops from Gaza. Following the redeployment, Israel placed new and increased restrictions over the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza. These restrictions were further tightened in 2006 after Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections and then tightened again in 2007 when Gaza was placed under siege following the Hamas-Fatah factional split. These restrictions on movement placed over Gaza are also addressed in more detail below.

Has Israel eased movement restrictions in the West Bank over the last several years?

Israel has made travel between major Palestinian population centers (Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Hebron) in the West Bank easier over the last several years. Several major checkpoints in the West Bank that restricted direct movement between and into these cities have been removed or modified. However, in general this opening is less the result of an overall easing in movement restrictions than the result of the institutionalization of movement controls into a formal and permanent regime of restrictions that has replaced roadblocks with gates that can be opened and closed at the whim of the military and that has reconfiguring how Palestinians travel.

According to the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#) the number of obstacles to movement inside the West Bank increased to 542 during 2013 from 529 in 2012. Approximately 100 of these obstacles are permanent staffed checkpoints and the others are roadblocks, gates, unmanned checkpoints, and other obstacles. Only 40 of these permanent checkpoints are a last inspection point before entry into Israel and most of these 40 checkpoints are located several kilometers inside the West Bank and not along the Green Line which is the internationally recognized demarcation line between the West Bank and Israel. Additionally, each month the Israeli military puts in place several hundred temporary checkpoints that change location from day to day and which are used to control Palestinian movement.^[ii]

Most of the movement restrictions in the West Bank are put in places to specifically restrict Palestinian access to roads used by settlers or to areas near or controlled by settlements. While Palestinian movement is severely restricted, a separate system of roads that are closed to Palestinians or that bypass Palestinian communities has been set up for Settlers to ensure their unrestricted movement in the West Bank and between the West Bank and Israel.^[iii] According to the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem,

“there were 67 kilometers of roads in the West Bank that Israel classified for the sole, or practically sole, use of Israelis, first and foremost of settlers. Israel also prohibits Palestinians from even crossing some of these roads with vehicles, thereby restricting their access to nearby roads that they are ostensibly not prohibited from using. In these cases, Palestinians travelers have to get out of their vehicle, cross the road on foot, and find an alternative mode of transportation on the other side.”^[iv]

OCHA has also reported that in 2013 at least 55 West Bank communities which are home to more than 180,000 people remain completely isolated as a result of roadblocks, barriers, checkpoints and other movement restrictions. All of the main roads into and out of these communities remain blocked and residents wishing to leave these communities must use alternative routes that are two to five times longer than the blocked direct routes. Many of these communities are located near the Wall, near settlements, or in the Jordan Valley.^[v]

How does the Wall impact Palestinian's Freedom of Movement?

As of late 2013 just over 60% of the Wall had been built. Although Israel has said that the ostensive purpose of the Wall is to stop Palestinians from crossing into Israel, 85% of the Wall's route runs through the West Bank as opposed to along the Green Line. When the Wall is completed 9.5% of all West Bank land will be located on the Western Side of the Wall and thus will be effectively annexed to Israel. ^[vi]

Included in the area cut off by the Wall are 71 illegal Israeli settlements and 33 Palestinian communities. The Palestinian communities are home to approximately 11,000 people and they are completely isolated from other areas of the West Bank. All residents of these communities over the age of 12 must obtain special residency permits from the Israeli military in order to remain in their homes. Residents can only enter and leave their communities through gates in the Wall that are controlled by the Israeli military which does not open them regularly. Because these are small and rural communities most of them do not have their own hospitals, schools, clinics, and stores and therefore rely on other nearby towns for these services. The Wall severely limits access to other towns and thus also cuts off access to these vital services.^[vii]

Agricultural land belonging to more than 150 West Bank communities, which are home to approximately 200,000 people, has also been de facto annexed to Israel as a result of the construction of the Wall. In theory this land can be accessed through 73 gates that have been built along the length of the Wall. However, 70 percent of the gates in the Wall are only open for a few weeks each year during the annual olive harvest. Only 11 gates are open on a daily basis and 10 more are open on a weekly basis. Even if these gates were open more regularly access to land that has been cut off would remain restricted by permit requirements. All of the land in these areas was declared a closed military zone in 2003 and all people wishing to enter these areas (including land owners) must obtain special permits from the Israeli military. According to OCHA only 40% of requests to the military for permits to allow entry to these areas receive a positive response.^[viii] The limits on access to these areas have decreased farming in these areas by over 80 percent.^[ix]

Are Jerusalem residents able to move freely?

After occupying East Jerusalem in 1967 Israel annexed the city, although this annexation has not been recognized or accepted by the international community which continues to view East Jerusalem as part of the occupied Palestinian territory. Palestinian residents of Jerusalem refused to accept the annexation of Jerusalem and therefore did not take full Israeli citizenship. Instead, Palestinian Jerusalemites are considered "Permanent Residents" of Jerusalem. [However, their status as residents of the city is anything but permanent.](#)

Since 1967 over [14,000 Palestinians](#) have had their residency rights in the city revoked.^[x] According to Israeli law the residency right of Palestinian Jerusalemites can be revoked if they leave Israel for a period of 7 years, if they gain permanent residency status in another country, if they gain citizenship status in another country, if they are declared a threat to national security, or if their center of life (job, home, etc.) as defined by the Israeli government is not in the city. Students studying abroad, individuals who leave Israel to pursue work opportunities, and Jerusalemites who gain employment in the West Bank have all had their Permanent Resident status revoked. Losing Permanent Resident status means losing their right to visit or live in Jerusalem.^[xi] These same restrictions

do not apply to Jewish Israeli residents of Jerusalem.

In 2002 Israel also froze the family reunification process through which Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza could gain Jerusalem residency rights if they married a Palestinian from Jerusalem. The Military Order that put in place this freeze was transformed into “The Nationality and Entry into Israeli Law” in 2003. This law makes it nearly impossible for Palestinian from the occupied Palestinian territory who are the spouses of Palestinian Jerusalemites (or Palestinian-Israelis) to gain citizenship. The effect of this law is that [Palestinians from Jerusalem who marry Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza](#) must move out of Jerusalem if they wish to live with their spouse, but if they move they risk losing their Jerusalem residency rights.

Therefore, while Palestinian residents of Jerusalem can travel more freely than Palestinians from other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory most of the time, their ability to change their place of residence and to leave Jerusalem for an extended period is severely limited.

How is movement restricted in Gaza?

The movement of both goods and people into and out of Gaza was strictly limited in 2005 when Israel unilaterally withdrew its settlers and redeployed its troops from Gaza. In that year Israel severely cut back the number of exit permits that it gave to Palestinians wishing to leave Gaza. These restrictions were strengthened in 2006 after Hamas’ victory in that year’s parliamentary elections. After Hamas won the elections Israel and the international community put in place [sanctions\[xii\]](#) against the Hamas run Palestinian Authority. These sanctions included limitations on imports to and exports from all of the occupied Palestinian territory.

In 2007 following the Hamas-Fatah split which saw Hamas seize control of the Gaza Strip, sanctions against the Palestinian Authority were ended in the West Bank, but strengthened in Gaza. These strengthened sanctions effectively placed a blockade over Gaza, severely limiting exports and imports and banning nearly all travel by residents of Gaza. Between 2007 and 2010, even basic necessities such as cooking gas, water filtration equipment, toilet paper, tooth paste, clothes, noodles, candy, and spices were blocked from entering Gaza. In 2010, the Israeli government announced an “easing” of the blockade and allowed for limited increases in imports such as clothing and food. However, severe restrictions on the import of many goods including the raw materials necessary for industrial production, construction materials, medical supplies, fuel, and many consumer goods were never lifted, and there was no easing on the restrictions imposed over exports from Gaza.

The movement of people into and out of Gaza is also severely restricted. Prior to the outbreak of the second Intifada approximately 26,000 people were allowed to leave Gaza each day via the Erez crossing. During the first half of 2013 only 200 people on average crossed Erez each day.[\[xiii\]](#) Students are denied exit to study abroad. Patients needing medical treatment not available in Gaza are delayed or blocked from reaching care. People with families in other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory are blocked from seeing their relatives. People wishing to leave to pursue work in other places are blocked from doing so. Nearly all access to the outside world for the residents of Gaza is blocked.

What is the impact of the blockade on people in Gaza?

The blockade has had a devastating impact on the Gaza population, affecting all aspects of life. According to [UN OCHA\[xiv\]](#), as of June 2013:

- Less than 200 people per day were allowed out of Gaza via Israel in the first half of 2013.
- Less than one truckload of goods per day were allowed out of Gaza during the first half of 2013.

- 57 percent of Gaza households are food insecure, and approximately 80 percent receive some form of food assistance.
- 35.5 percent of those able and willing to work are unemployed – one of the highest unemployment rates in the world.
- Due to fuel shortages, there are power outages for up to 12 hours per day in most areas of Gaza.
- Only 25 percent of households in Gaza receive running water every day, and then only for a few hours.
- Over 90 percent of the water extracted from the Gaza aquifer is unsafe for human consumption, while needed filtration equipment cannot be imported to Gaza.
- Nearly 90 million liters of untreated or partially treated sewage is dumped into the sea off of Gaza every day while equipment needed to build new or maintain existing treatment facilities are banned from entering Gaza.

It must be emphasized that, despite the terrible human suffering caused by the blockade, the situation in Gaza should not be viewed as a humanitarian crisis that can be resolved through the provision of international aid and assistance. Rather, the current situation in Gaza is a political crisis that can only be resolved through political action. All of the impacts outlined above are the direct result of Israeli actions and policies, and ending the crisis in Gaza therefore requires ending the blockade and Israel's continued occupation of the Palestinian territory, which are at the root of the crisis.

Since the Israeli military's redeployment of its forces outside of Gaza are there any restrictions on movement in Gaza?

Movement in Gaza is restricted in what is known as the "restricted access area". The Gaza "restricted access area" (often referred to as the buffer zone) is an area along the Wall that has been built between Gaza and Israel. In this area Palestinians can be shot on sight by the Israeli military.^[xv] The restricted access area was first created during the second Intifada when Israel began enforcing a 150-meter no-go zone along the Eastern border of Gaza. At that time Israel also began systematically demolishing homes and structures in areas near the Gaza borders in the north and south of the Gaza Strip. In May 2009, the Israeli military announced an expansion of the restricted access area in leaflets they dropped on Gaza from the air. These leaflets warned people that anyone coming within 300 meters of the border could be shot. Additional homes and structures in this area were subsequently destroyed. In addition to the official 300-meter restricted access area, Israeli forces conduct regular raids one and two kilometers into Gaza and constantly monitor all areas up to two kilometers into Gaza. The land included in the restricted access area accounts for 17 percent of the total Gaza land area and includes 35 percent of Gaza's agricultural land.^[xvi]

How are corporations complicit in helping Israel restrict Palestinians freedom of movement?

Israel's restriction of Palestinian movement is made possible through support provided by a number of international corporations. These corporations include:

Hewlett Packard – Hewlett Packard (HP) produces the biometric ID systems used to track and control Palestinian movement. The IDs produced using HP technology are similar in nature to the passbooks produced by Polaroid during the Apartheid era and used by the Apartheid government to control the movement of Black South Africans.

All Palestinians wishing to enter Israel must apply to the Israeli military authorities for a magnetic biometric ID card. Each electronic ID card contains biometric, personal, and security information. While only a fraction of Palestinians who apply for permits actually receive them, each applicant's information is kept and stored in a database held by the Israeli authorities. Over the years, Israel has accumulated this information into a population registry that contains information about every Palestinian in the occupied Palestinian territory over the age of 16. Biometric data is

collected as part of the BASEL system, a biometric access control system, which is installed in major Israeli checkpoints in the occupied West Bank. This system is used to restrict Palestinian movement across checkpoints inside the West Bank and to grant or deny special movement privileges (see for example this [UN Report](#)).

[EDS Israel](#), now part of HP Enterprise Services, is responsible for developing, integrating, and maintaining the BASEL system.^[xvii]

Elbit Systems - Elbit Systems is directly involved in many Israeli military operations and has developed technologies specifically suited for the control and repression of the civilian Palestinian population. In addition to manufacturing weapons, Elbit and its subsidiaries Elbit Electro-Optics (EI-Op) and Elbit Security Systems (Ortek) have been contracted to supply surveillance systems such as the LORROS (Long-Range Reconnaissance and Observation System) for use along the length of the Wall. [Grassroots International](#) has estimated that Elbit makes over \$2 million per kilometer from the construction of the Wall. This makes Elbit one of the major profiteers from the construction of the Wall.^[xviii]

What can you do?

Demand an immediate end to movement restrictions in Palestine: Although the US government is aware of the impact that Israeli imposed movement restrictions have on Palestinians, it has not taken any effective actions to demand change. Contact your government representatives and the State Department and demand that they call for change. Ask that they:

1. Call for the dismantling by Israel of the Wall in the West Bank in fulfillment of the International Court of Justice's 2004 ruling which declared the Wall illegal.
2. Demand that Israel allow Palestinians to move freely between communities inside the occupied Palestinian territory, between the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, and internationally.
3. Call for the removal of the 549 roadblocks, checkpoints, gates, and other barriers used to restrict Palestinian movement in the West Bank.

Demand an immediate end to the siege on Gaza: U.S. government policy officially supports Israel's continued siege on Gaza and the Isolation of Hamas. This is a situation that must end. Contact your government representatives and the State Department and demand that they call for an immediate change in U.S. government policy and support both the complete end to Israel's siege on Gaza and engagement with Hamas. The siege is illegal and immoral and must end. Additionally, if any solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict is going to be found all political factions including Hamas must be at the table and involved in reaching an agreement. U.S. policy must change.

Join the Palestinian led [BDS movement](#):^[xix] Support or organize a BDS campaign against either of the companies listed above or other companies that support Israel's occupation or violence in Palestine and Israel. One of the fastest growing boycott campaigns is one that targets Hewlett Packard because of the role that it plays in facilitating the restriction of Palestinian movement. The "[Coalition to Stop HP](#)"^[xx] has organized a national campaign which asks both individuals and groups to boycott HP. More information about this campaign and HP can be found on the [Global Exchange](#) website.^[xxi] Other campaigns in the U.S. that you can support include the Caterpillar Boycott, SodaStream Boycott, Veolia Boycott and [more](#)^[xxii].

Share information with others: Raise awareness in your community about the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and about the Israeli imposed movement restrictions faced by the Palestinian population.

Learn more

The following organizations in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel address and challenge Israel's movement restriction policies.

Al-Haq – <http://www.alhaq.org>

Al-Mezan - <http://www.mezan.org/en/>

The Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem - <http://www.civiccoalition-jerusalem.org/>

Palestinian Center for Human Rights - <http://www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/>

Gaza Community and Mental Health Program - <http://www.gcmhp.net/en/>

The Boycott National Committee – <http://www.bdsmovement.net>

The Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign – <http://www.stophewall.org>

Anarchists Against the Wall – <http://www.awalls.org>

Taayush – <http://www.taayush.org>

B'Tselem - <http://www.btselem.org/>

Gisha – <http://www.gisha.org/>

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - <http://www.ochaopt.org/>

About AFSC

Since 1948, AFSC has worked in the U.S., Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territory with Palestinians, Israelis, and other committed activists to support nonviolence, challenge oppression, and (since 1970) to end Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory. This work is guided by our "[Principles for a Just and Lasting Peace in Palestine and Israel](#)"^[xxiii]. These principles support the implementation of international human rights and humanitarian law and call for an end to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory, implementation of refugees' right of return, equality, and justice for Palestinians and Israelis.

[i] http://www.btselem.org/legal_documents/emergency_regulations

[ii] http://www.btselem.org/freedom_of_movement/checkpoints_and_forbidden_roads

[iii] http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_movement_and_access_report_september_2012_english.pdf

[iv] http://www.btselem.org/freedom_of_movement/checkpoints_and_forbidden_roads

[v] http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_fragmented_lives_annual_report_2013_english_web.pdf

[vi] Ibid

[vii] http://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier

- [viii] http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_the_humanitarian_monitor_2013_05_24_english.pdf
- [ix] http://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier
- [x] http://www.btselem.org/jerusalem/revocation_statistics
- [xi] http://www.civiccoalition-jerusalem.org/system/files/palestinians_-_residence_in_their_home_final.pdf
- [xii] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/06/17/us-palestinians-funds-idUSL8196756120070617>
- [xiii] http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_blockade_factsheet_july_2013_english.pdf
- [xiv] http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_blockade_factsheet_july_2013_english.pdf
- [xv] http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_special_focus_2010_08_19_english.pdf
- [xvi] <http://www.mezan.org/upload/13210.pdf>
- [xvii] <https://wedivest.org/c/57/hp#.Uq4R3ela5pE>
- [xviii] <http://www.globalexchange.org/economicactivism/elbit/why>
- [xix] <https://afsc.org/story/boycott-divestment-and-sanctions-explained>
- [xx] <http://www.globalexchange.org/economicactivism/hp/joinus>
- [xxi] <http://www.globalexchange.org/economicactivism/campaigns/hp>
- [xxii] <http://www.endtheoccupation.org/section.php?id=203>
- [xxiii] https://afsc.org/sites/afsc.civicactions.net/files/documents/AFSC%20Principles%20for%20a%20Just%20and%20Lasting%20Peace_0.pdf