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West Bank Wall

Impacts on the environment, agriculture, water supply and waste management



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Stefan Ziegler (4)



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In 2002, following the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Israel started constructing the Wall which restricts the mobility of Palestinians and cuts off Palestinian farmers from their land. Although its route has been revised a number of times it is currently projected to be 708 kilometres long. If completed as planned, 85 per cent of the Wall will run inside the territory of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. By July 2012, approximately 62 per cent of the Wall had been completed, a further eight per cent was under construction and about 30 per cent is planned but not yet constructed. The projected route of the Wall deviates from the internationally recognised 1949 Armistice (Green) Line deep into the West Bank fragmenting the contiguity of the West Bank.

In 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an Advisory Opinion on the «Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory», which declared the Wall and its associated regime to be illegal, and called on Israel to terminate its breaches of international law with immediate effect.

The construction process and the Wall's physical structure severely impact the Palestinian population

and their environment. In effect, the Wall route, if completed, will isolate 9,4 per cent of West Bank land between the Wall and the Green Line. This land comprises some of the West Bank's most fertile agriculture and grazing lands as well as some of the most important water sources in the region.

Currently around 7500 Palestinians reside in the area between the Green Line and the Wall, popularly referred to as the «Seam Zone». Another 23000 will be isolated in the same way if the Wall is completed as planned. Despite the fact that there is no physical barrier between the Seam Zone residents' homes and the territory of the State of Israel, entry into Israel is forbidden to Palestinians without valid permits. They can only access Palestinian territory on the other side of the Wall if passing through Israeli armed checkpoints. It is important to note that Palestinians living in the Seam Zone need to pass through checkpoints for almost any services, such as work, education, family ties, religious and cultural events. For most of the 7500 persons living in these enclaves, and who are aged 16 and above, permits need to get regularly renewed from the Civil Administration, a branch of the Israeli Defence Forces, simply to continue living in their own homes.

Land degradation and impacts on agriculture

Wall construction frequently results in land degradation, fragmentation of ecosystems, erosion and compaction of soil, heaping up of earth walls, indiscriminate disposal of waste and accumulation of dust on agricultural lands and trees. These activities impact the productivity of lands and often severely diminish agricultural production resulting in loss of income for farming families. The Wall's associated gate and permit regime restricts Palestinian farmers' access to land, which has caused a decline in agricultural production and changes in farming practices of affected communities of which UNRWA's Barrier Monitoring Unit together with the Palestine Central Statistics office (PCBS) counted a total of 173 along the current route. To date, thousands of productive olivetrees, a mainstay of farmers in Palestine, have been uprooted for the construction of the Wall. Two-thirds of the 68 agricultural gates that control Palestinian access to their lands across the Wall are open for less than one or two months per year during the annual olive harvest. Not permitted thus to regularly access and maintain their trees, impacted farmers report a 50 to 60 per cent decline in the yield of their annual harvests.

1 Qalandyia village, recent construction of the Wall.

2 Barta'a terminal, northern West Bank.

3 Jenin governorate.

4 Drainage pipes and solid waste, Qalqilyia city.

5-7 In the vicinity of the Aida refugee camp, north of Bethlehem, West Bank, 2013.



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Julien Perrochet (3)

For the vast majority of communities, land for grazing within the «Seam Zone» is off limits to shepherds and their animals. With limited pastures remaining, and unable to bear the high costs of commercial fodder, these communities report a loss of up to 60 per cent of their livestock. This places a heavy burden on households where meat and dairy products were previously used for domestic consumption, but also generated vital revenue.

Restricted access to water resources – waste management and flooding

The construction of the Wall has damaged, destroyed or rendered inaccessible vital sources of water such as wells, cisterns and springs. Once damaged water sources can rarely be repaired because of permit restrictions. Drainage pipes built

under the Wall often become blocked by debris. However, Palestinians are not permitted to approach to clear them. Additionally, the Wall also obstructs the flow of surface water in many areas. Water trapped by the Wall can frequently cause flooding resulting in the degradation of agricultural lands. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PaMbnma1YiQ)

The Wall also causes significant problems for the management of

sewage and solid waste, as disposal sites were rendered inaccessible due to their location in relation to the Wall. As such, affected communities must either transport their solid waste to distant landfill sites at their own cost, or burn garbage within residential areas – releasing toxic emissions and leachate into the soil. Raw sewage is disposed of on agricultural land, subsequently contaminating soil and groundwater.

Stefan Ziegler, former project manager of the BMU and sp

Barrier Monitoring Unit

The Barrier Monitoring Unit (BMU) was established by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in March 2010. The BMU was predominantly funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The unit together with its many local and international partners developed the most comprehensive method of analysis of the Wall to date. It documented the impact of the Wall and its associated gate and permit regime on the lives of Palestinians living in the West Bank including East Jerusalem. The BMU was closed down in May 2013. www.unrwa.org/bmu



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