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Anarchists against the wall

Israel Report: Repression allowed, resistance denied

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It has been five years since the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued its advisory opinion on the Wall in the occupied Palestinian territory – where they held in a unanimous opinion that it was illegal and should be dismantled. No significant advance in the situation on the ground has been achieved, and the Wall construction continues relentlessly. Instead, since the Court started its hearings in February 2004, the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) have intensified repression of the affected villages struggling against the Wall, killing the first activists. The gaze of the international community must now turn not only to the illegality and injustice of the Wall, but also to the plight of those still attempting to resist its construction. In villages across the West Bank, local residents have formed committees and taken on a campaign of mass popular resistance to the Wall, engaging in weekly, and even daily, demonstrations. These communities have faced a staggering level of repression and violence from the Israeli authorities. It is the aim of this report to investigate that repression and to determine its true extent and nature.

That a blanket of fear and repression should be imposed on protesting communities largely defenseless against it is a logical extension of Israel's security narrative. The fear felt in the communities discussed in this report are not an isolated phenomenon, but rather the mirror image of the ideologies at work in the Israeli discourse. The narrative of security and self-defense can be seen both in the Wall's construction, and in the Israeli military's statements on fatalities and injuries at Wall protests. Deliberate killings are narrated as accidents and misdemeanors under fire from rocks and chanting, grievous injuries as unfortunate byproducts of effective crowd control. Too often this version of events is accepted and projected by the international media.

In the course of this report we provide evidence to show that injuries and deaths inflicted by the Israeli military at protests and activity surrounding them are intentional, not accidental. The reintroduction and heavy use of live ammunition and fragmenting bullets is a clear indicator that Israeli policy is designed to harm and kill, as is the regular firing of metal tear gas canisters directly at demonstrators.

Furthermore, it is now increasingly clear that a significant proportion – if not a majority – of fatalities recorded in this report were the result of a qualitatively more extreme form of intent. The recorded shooting of fleeing demonstrators, the use of snipers and silencers, undercover soldiers opening fire with live ammunition, and the chasing down and assassination of children within a demonstration display an intent that is not only generally lethal, but precise and calculated. Such calculations are often racially selective. Violence at demonstrations is deliberately softened when internationals are present, and the brunt of the lethal measures are reserved for Palestinians.

Israel is engaged in low intensity warfare against Palestinian communities resisting the Wall. By targeting the entire community as well as individuals within it, the Israeli military aims to break and undermine the popular resistance. Collective punishment, which manifests itself in curfews, sieges, and destruction of property, aims at sowing divisions within communities, breaking villages' support for resistance to the Wall. This layer of repression is accompanied by a campaign of threats, and the intentional injury and killing necessary in order to follow them through.

The effects of this campaign have been at once both devastating and counterproductive. It has wrecked the lives of innocent people, paralyzed communities, shut down livelihoods and taken the lives of villagers barely into their teens. Nonetheless, the popular protest movement has shown a remarkable ability not only to survive, but to grow and spread, cultivating a new generation of activists and leaders, and taking root in new areas. How this phase of the

popular protest movement will end depends in no small way upon the resolve of the villagers and willingness of global forces to take action as laid out in the recommendations at the end of this report. The international community has a duty to bear witness to the crimes being perpetrated with the construction of the Wall, and to act to protect and aid those who resist it.

Key findings of this report can be summarized as follows:

- The killing, maiming and punitive attacks are systematic and premeditated, not sporadic and accidental. They are tactically intended to create a highly visible spectacle, rendering victims as examples.
- Entire villages are targeted with the aim of inflicting damage on the community as a whole. Collective punishment complements spectacular violence by sowing divisions between villagers.
- The IOF explicitly inform villagers of the rationale behind their violence in order to maximize the effectiveness of these measures.
- Occupation forces consistently target protestors, predominately youth, with the stated intent of causing serious, at times permanent, injury. This involves the use of beatings, lethal ammunition, “non-lethal” ammunition and, more recently, 40mm high velocity tear gas canisters, in addition to threats, denial of permits, curfews and tear-gassing.
- Between 2005 and 2009, at least 1,566 Palestinians were injured in weekly demonstrations in four villages, namely Bil’in, Ni’lin, Ma’sara and Jayyous. Evidence suggests, however, that more injuries have occurred in other villages that were not included in this report. A further 16 people, half of them children, have been killed in villages protesting against the Wall since 2004.
- We have documented the cases of 171 Palestinians who have been arrested by the IOF in relation to Wall-related protests and activities in five villages since 2002: Budrus, Bilin, Nilin, Jayyous and Ma’sara. Interviews with activists suggest that many more activists are likely to have been arrested in other villages. Further research is needed to expose the extent of Israel’s arrest and detention policies.
- Children and youths are particularly targeted by the IOF during raids and arrest campaigns, usually under the false pretext of being stone throwers and ‘trouble-makers’, although they are by no means the only ones arrested.
- Members and heads of the Popular Committees in respective villages were also initially targeted by IOF during the first years of the Wall’s construction, in order to break up protests and create disunity, especially since these committees have been the most vocal in their non-violence protest and have been instrumental in coordinating and mobilizing weekly protests.

As of March 2009, there have been 129 indictments of Israeli activists protesting against the Occupation. Out of these, at least 41 were Israeli members of Anarchists Against the Wall who were directly involved in protests against the Wall, either in Israel or the West Bank.

Lastly, this report offers practical recommendations to: the United Nations; the international community, with a special focus on the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention; Palestinian and international human rights NGOs; and, international and local media. The aim of these recommendations is to establish protection mechanisms for inhabitants of Wall-affected communities, and, most importantly, Palestinian human rights activists leading the resistance against the Wall.

Out of a list of recommendations, both Stop the Wall and Addameer wish to emphasize that it is crucial for the international community to finally:

– Take real action to ensure that Israel complies with the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, as a step to fulfilling its wider obligations under international law. This would mean: (1) stopping the construction of the Wall in the occupied Palestinian territories; (2) dismantling the sections built to date; and (3) providing compensation for all damage, including for land confiscation caused by the construction of the Wall.

– Until then, establish mechanisms aiming at protecting the popular resistance against the Wall in their rightful protests against the Wall's construction and land confiscation by (1) ensuring a permanent and institutionalized presence of international monitors in wall-affected villages to prevent the use of indiscriminate force – including arbitrary arrests – during weekly demonstration as well as acts of collective punishment at night – including raids, curfews, cases of threats and intimidation against protestors, and (2) interfering with the Israeli authorities in cases of arbitrary detention of Palestinian protestors.