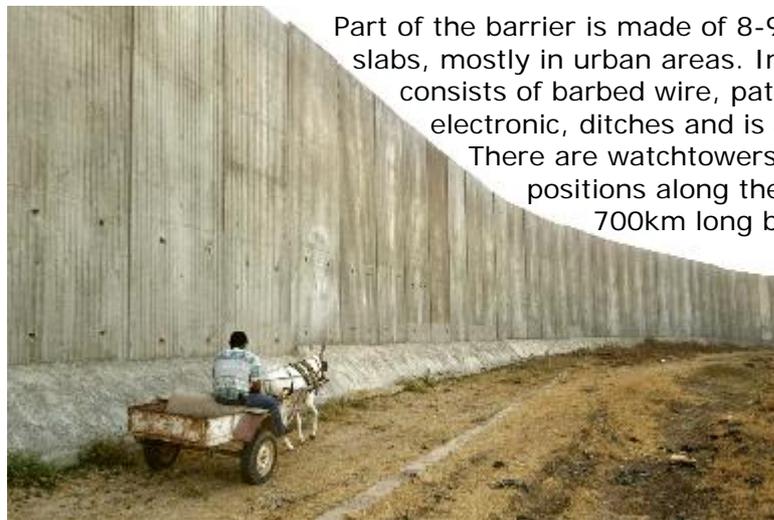


- ◇ The Occupied Palestinian Territories are comprised of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Israel has been occupying them since 1967.
- ◇ Israel has established settlements in the West Bank—Jewish only communities often built on Palestinian land. These are illegal under international law which states that “the Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies”
- ◇ Even before the barrier, it was a dire situation

In 2002, Israel starting building a barrier around part of the Palestinian territory it occupies called the West Bank. The barrier, which is not yet complete, has already affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. The barrier encircles Palestinian towns and villages, separating communities and families from each other, farmers from their land, workers from their workplaces, students and teachers from education, and the sick from healthcare. Some people describe the West Bank as an open air prison because of the barrier. Many Palestinians are now forced to be dependent on aid.



Part of the barrier is made of 8-9m concrete slabs, mostly in urban areas. In rural areas, it consists of barbed wire, patrolled roads, electronic, ditches and is about 50m wide. There are watchtowers and sniper positions along the length of the 700km long barrier.

Did you know...Like the Great Wall of China, the barrier can be seen from space.

A full map was only made public after the construction had started. The Green Line is the internationally recognised border between Israel and the West Bank (which is occupied by Israel). The barrier does not run along the Green Line but cuts into Palestinian land – 80% of the barrier is in the West Bank.



What's in a name?

There are disagreements about what to call the construction. Each word that is used creates a certain image of what the construction is and what its effects will be – so none is neutral and each one is controversial.

- ◇ The official Israeli line is to call it a **fence** or **security fence** – suggesting the main reason for building it is Israeli security.
- ◇ Critics of this view call it a **wall** or occasionally **barrier**. Some add a word, such as **apartheid wall** (apartheid was the name of the system in South Africa) or they call it a **separation wall**.
- ◇ The International Court of Justice used the term ‘wall’

? When you have read this backgrounder, choose what word **you** would use to describe the construction and think about why.



How are ordinary Palestinians affected?

how the barrier affects Palestinians

- ◇ Access to work and basic services difficult
- ◇ Communities and families split up
- ◇ Destruction of livelihoods
- ◇ Slicing up of West Bank
- ◇ Destruction and confiscation of land, homes and resources
- ◇ Consolidation of occupation and Israeli control over Palestinian lives
- ◇ Irrigation networks damaged
- ◇ Education severely disrupted
- ◇ Soaring unemployment



The path of the barrier snakes, and loops and detours, eating up Palestinian land. Land in its path, or on either side, has been taken from Palestinians by the Israeli authorities for "military needs". Some Palestinian homes have even been demolished to make way for the barrier.



Olive trees being uprooted

Large areas of cultivated Palestinian land have been destroyed in the process. Over a hundred thousand olive and fruit trees which Palestinians were dependent on to make a living have been uprooted. Olive trees are also a deeply felt symbol of Palestinian identity and heritage. Palestinians will not be compensated for the land confiscated and property damaged in order to build the wall.

Some people's land has been destroyed entirely. Others find themselves on opposite sides of the barrier from their land (which happens because the barrier doesn't run along the Green Line). In the first phase of the building of the barrier alone, more than 50 communities were isolated from the majority of their lands.

Palestinians have had no choice but to depend more and more on agriculture for their survival, due to Israeli policies limited their movement. But now livelihoods based on agriculture are being made impossible by the barrier – people are losing their main and sometimes only source of income.

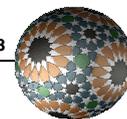


Mufida, 35, after her trees were uprooted to make way for the barrier

Moving around



There are gates in the barrier which people can go through to get to their land if they have a permit. Getting a permit, which is only valid for one gate, is a very difficult, uncertain and long process, and is often unsuccessful for reasons that are unclear. Even for permit holders it is not easy – the gates are not always open (often only for three times a day for 20 minutes!), they often have to travel long distances, usually along unpaved roads, to get to the gate (which is only possible for the fit and healthy). Plus, tractors and other vehicles are often not allowed through the gates, so agricultural produce cannot be transported. Permits to access cultivable land are often given to parents who are too elderly to farm the land but denied to those younger family members who could do the farming. In 2006, only 26 of the 61 gates in the barrier were open to Palestinians for use all year—these were open for only 64% of the officially stated time.



West Bank Separation Barrier:
Qalkilya and Environs



Consider this map

The dashed line is the internationally recognised Green Line.

The red line is the barrier itself.

The light grey area indicates the parts of the West Bank between Israel and the barrier.

60 500 Palestinians living in 42 villages and towns will be trapped in the closed zone between the barrier and the Green Line. 500 000 living near the barrier need permits to access their land.

Look at Qalkilya — Qalkilya used to be a key agricultural centre in the West Bank with very fertile lands.

Now the town is surrounded on three sides by the barrier – there is only one military entrance as the sole entry and exit for the city. Over a third of the city's shops have closed down as customers cannot reach them.

Over half its agricultural land has been confiscated. Together farmers go to the confiscated land to harvest what is left of their crops – risking their lives and safety to travel to land which is declared a 'closed military zone'.

At one school in Qalkilya, the Israeli military fired tear gas repeatedly at people too close to the construction area.

The barrier severely limits people's freedom of movement

Why is the right to freedom of movement so important?

It is a right which links to other rights – the right to medical care, education, work, economic wellbeing, contact with families. Because of restrictions to their movement – Palestinians in the West Bank often cannot access basic services or ways to sustain a livelihood. For example, due to restrictions on their movement, students and teachers struggle daily to reach schools and universities.

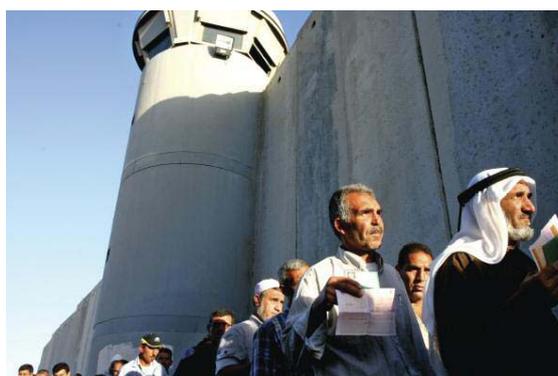


Unequal distribution of water resources is being made more unequal by the barrier. Even though the Occupied Palestinian Territories have the highest groundwater occurrence of water in the region, Palestinians use far less water than Israelis (lower than what the UN says is necessary to meet basic needs)

The barrier is being constructed over some of the West Bank's most fertile areas, affecting local access to water and with serious implications for longer term water use.

The barrier winds its way around areas with many wells and the most valuable water reserves, leaving many communities cut off from the wells on which they were dependent.

These Palestinian workers queue by the barrier at dawn in Bethlehem. They get up at five in the morning and, permits in hand, make their way to the checkpoint, hoping it will be open and they will be granted permission to cross into Jerusalem and reach their workplaces. (Christian Aid)





Why is the barrier being built?

According to the Israeli authorities, it is "a defensive measure, designed to block the passage of terrorists, weapons and explosives into the State of Israel."

Critics, including human rights organisations, say there is a hole in this argument: If the barrier was just for security, why is it not built on the internationally recognized Green Line? Why does it run deep inside Palestinian land and not between Israel and the West Bank?

Why is 80% of the barrier in the West Bank?

The route of the barrier has been determined by the location of Israeli settlements in the West Bank – often leaving additional land around them so that they can expand. The settlements are Jewish only communities which are in violation of international law. The UN suggests that the purpose is to incorporate these into Israel and expand Israel, changing its borders. When the barrier is complete, 76% of the settler population and 10% of the West Bank will lie behind the barrier on the Israeli side.

Palestinians hope one day to have an independent state in the land that Israel now occupies. The barrier makes this increasingly unlikely. The former Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, confirmed this. The BBC reported him saying, "When you fence areas and communities in the West Bank, you end a lot of their dreams," and "In the plan, there is no Palestinian state".

Any measure Israel undertakes in the Occupied Territories in the name of security must comply with its obligations under international law – do they?



In July 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) – otherwise known as the World Court – ruled that the barrier violated international law on a number of counts. The ruling related to those parts of the barrier which did not run along the internationally recognized Green Line but deviated from it, cutting into the West Bank.

The court issued an advisory opinion calling for:

- ◇ the construction of the barrier in the West Bank to be stopped immediately
- ◇ the parts of the barrier built inside the West Bank to be dismantled
- ◇ the Palestinians who suffered losses as a result of the barrier to be compensated
- ◇ the international community to act to prevent the construction of the barrier

The Israeli authorities have disregarded the ICJ's finding and recommendations, and continued with the construction of the barrier.

The court stated that while Israel has the right and duty to protect its citizens against violence, its defensive actions must comply with international law.



Consider and discuss this quote from Amnesty International

Durable security cannot be addressed by more repression and more walls and barriers. It can only be achieved if the human rights of all are guaranteed



These signs along the barrier say in Hebrew, Arabic, and English: 'Mortal Danger – military zone – any person who passes or damages the fence endangers his life'. Indeed, being near the barrier can put Palestinians in danger. Amnesty International reported the case of two schoolgirls, aged 12 and 14 playing near the barrier, shot by Israeli soldiers from a fortified watchtower. No-one has been brought to justice for these killings.

This is Abd a-Latif 'Odeh, from a-Dab'a village. His land is on the other side of the barrier in the background. Since the barrier was constructed, he has had to travel twenty-two kilometres to reach the land, which is actually next to his home



Resisting the barrier...

Palestinians have filed dozens of petitions against the Barrier's route, held countless demonstrations, organised tours, risked their lives to harvest their crops, set up projects to replant olive trees, and anything else they can think of. Sometimes they have done this alone, and sometimes in co-operation with Israeli and international sympathisers.

In one village, Bil'in, there have been demonstrations every Friday for two years with supportive Israelis taking part. According to Amnesty, hundred of demonstrators have been injured as soldiers fire plastic-coated metal bullets and some demonstrators are beaten with rifle butts. The village is also taking legal steps to challenge the barrier's path – which has taken 50% of village land.



A group of Israeli supporters wrote a letter to potential supporters in which they said:

What do you think about this?

If the non-violent struggle in Bil'in fails, and the barrier remains in its current route, the message will be that non-violent popular struggle is ineffective in the occupied territories, and that the only mode of opposing the 40-year long Israeli occupation is a violent one



Caterpillar D9 bulldozers in the occupied territories

Here, Caterpillar is best known for its rugged boots, bags and clothing. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories it is more known by the fact that its bulldozers are being used by the Israeli army to destroy Palestinian homes, schools, orchards and olive groves, and their machines are building the Separation Barrier. Caterpillar armoured bulldozers have become an indispensable part of the Israeli army's arsenal. There is a campaign to boycott Caterpillar—what do you think about this? Would you join a boycott?