

Siege

The siege that the IDF has been imposing on many of the Palestinian towns and villages in the Territories since year 2000, is accomplished through physical barriers that are built around these towns and villages, such as trenches, concrete blocks, mounds and fences, and manned barriers, comprising tanks and armored vehicles. Despite a previous undertaking to the HCJ,⁵⁰ sometimes the IDF does not leave a single road open to the besieged town. Cars are unable to cross the physical barriers, and are detained at the manned barriers, which sometimes block entry and exit for days on end. While some of the physical barriers can be crossed by foot, this is not only an exhausting physical effort but could also turn into a life-threatening exercise, should any military patrol happen to pass by. In the past year the situation has only got worse: siege has been imposed on more towns and was tightened in those where it had already been imposed before. The impact of siege is more detrimental in small villages, which depend on other towns from which they get vital supplies and services. With no doctor, school, places of employment or food warehouses – the siege completely disrupts normal everyday life, including all economic functioning.

The Mawasi area, in which around 8,500 Palestinians live, is a Palestinian enclave in the south part of the Gaza Strip, encircled by the Jewish settlements of Gush Katif. The residents of the Mawasi depend on the urban centers in the Gaza Strip for medical and financial services, for schools and for social and cultural needs.

Their access to and from the region was regulated in the 1994 Agreement Concerning the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area. On May 12, 2002, the IDF imposed a siege on the Mawasi. HaMoked's processing of this inquiry in May and June was described in the previous activity report.⁵¹ In July it appeared that the concessions HaMoked had obtained for passage to and from the area were being ignored, and that the situation was getting worse: ambulances were being detained for hours, farmers were barred from watering their fields, water wells could not be repaired, food supplies were dwindling, and entry and exit applications submitted to the DCO were not being handled at all. HaMoked contacted the IDF once again, demanding that it define passage criteria that would enable normal living conditions. Concurrently, HaMoked tried to secure exit and entry permits for individuals:

S.S. was admitted to the European Hospital in Khan Yunis with severe weakness on October 13. His condition deteriorated and by the end of the month it was clear he was dying. His mother and brother, who are residents of the Mawasi, wanted to be with him in his last hours. On October 27, HaMoked contacted the office of the Gaza Strip legal advisor. They were allowed to leave the Mawasi area that very same day.

One day in October, five high school students, aged 16-17, who live in the Mawasi, left for school in Khan Yunis. The IDF prohibited them from going back home. The boys have been trying to get

back home ever since. Some are staying with relatives, and some sleep in deserted houses. In November and December HaMoked made several appeals on their behalf to the IDF, but with no success. At the beginning of January 2003, HaMoked contacted the State Attorney's Office, asking that this wrong be righted as soon as possible. On January 17, about four months after they had last seen their parents, brothers and sisters, the five students were permitted back into the Mawasi, but their access back to school has not been guaranteed yet. HaMoked has asked the State Attorney's Office to arrange for that as well. **(Case 17845)**

K.P. left the Mawasi to attend her brother's wedding in Khan Yunis in the beginning of October. When she tried to go back home, she discovered that the roadblock was closed and that there was no way for her to return. On October 19, after she had tried to cross the roadblock three times, her husband contacted HaMoked. Later that day it transpired that there was a large group of women and children who for two weeks had been trying to return to their homes. HaMoked was working vis-à-vis the IDF that entire day, and in the afternoon it was informed that the roadblock would only be opened the next day. No explanation was provided as to why it could not be opened immediately. The following day the roadblock was opened and K.P. returned to her home. **(Case E454)**

One of the most difficult outcomes of the siege imposed on the towns of the West Bank is a serious shortage in water in the 281 Palestinian villages that are not connected to the water system and

depend on water tankers from nearby towns. Since the siege was imposed, the 200,000 residents of these villages have been suffering a serious water shortage, especially in summertime, when most wells dry up. The physical barriers prevent tankers from passing through and force them to take long detours, and the manned barriers cause long delays – if any vehicles are allowed through at all.⁵² The amount of water available in these villages is dropping and the price of water is climbing, although many of the residents are below the poverty line. Because of the extended siege, residents in these villages live on an amount of water that falls below the required minimum (50 liters per capita per day), and when the tankers do not arrive, they use low-grade water that endangers their health.⁵³ During the summer, HaMoked received dozens of calls from villagers and tanker drivers, asking to help the tankers get through the roadblocks. HaMoked handled every such call individually, and also contacted the authorities, demanding a general solution for the water shortage in the village at hand.

In Beit Furik, southeast of Nablus, there are 8,000 residents and about 15,000 head of sheep and cattle. In July and August, HaMoked handled several inquiries about delays in the water supply that were

50 HCJ Petition 3637/01, **Shakarna and others v. IDF Commander in the West Bank**, Takdin Elion 2002(1), 249.

51 HaMoked, **Semi-Annual Report: January-June 2002**, p. 24.

52 B'Tselem, **Not Even A Drop: Water Crisis in Palestinian Villages**, information sheet, July 2001.

53 **Haaretz**, October 16, 2002, p. B1.

caused by the manned barriers and by physical barriers on the access roads. In some cases, the tankers made it to the village after hours or days of delay. In others, they did not make it at all. Before the siege, tankers from Nablus used to come to the village five times a day. On days in the summer of 2002 when there were no special delays, only two tankers made to the village every day. Villagers were thus forced to walk many kilometers by foot to find old wells where some stale water was still left. On September 4, HaMoked contacted the West Bank legal advisor, asking him to regulate the movement of water tankers to Beit Furik and other villages in the area without delay. Five days later the answer came in: "except for a few sporadic incidents," water tankers are allowed through on a daily basis, and HaMoked's grievance is therefore unfounded. But the situation actually got worse: the number of calls

HaMoked was receiving increased, and new grievances were added: truck drivers' keys and IDs were being confiscated. HaMoked contacted the authorities once again, asking to reconsider the matter. The answer provided this time was that after reinvestigating the issue, and following a thorough discussion, it had been decided to remove one of the physical barriers on one of the roads to the village and instead install a gate that would be operated by soldiers. This would allow the tankers to take a shorter route from Nablus. It was further decided to enable the residents themselves, subject to IDF approval, to remove another barrier on the same road, so as to enable tankers to reach other villages in the region as well. HaMoked checked with the head of the village, and found that the changes were indeed implemented, and that since then there have been no problems with the water supply. **(Cases 22417, E164 and others)**

Curfew

During the IDF invasions of the territories of the PA in February, March and April, curfew was imposed on the villages and towns entered by IDF forces. Since these towns in the West Bank were invaded in the end of June and until the end of September, most of them were under curfew for more than 70% of the time. Nablus was hit hardest, as the curfew there was only lifted for a total of 75 hours over a period of 80 days.⁵⁴ In most villages and towns, the curfew was lifted for a few hours a day, at

different hours every time. But even then it was not safe to leave the house, since curfew was sometimes reimposed sooner than expected, and residents who were at the time outside of their homes were liable to be shot by soldiers. Curfew disrupts life wherever it is imposed: going to work, school or the grocery store becomes impossible, and evacuation of pregnant women and sick and injured persons turns into a complex, risky operation. In most cases, curfew is imposed without any