

Entry into the Gaza Strip

During the month of October 1999 the safe passage (in a reduced version) was finally opened between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The passage, while improving the freedom of movement of the residents of the Occupied Territories, did not solve the problems of all those who need to travel between the two areas. The use of the safe passage was made dependent on the holding of a magnetic card, which is not issued to residents who have a status of being “prevented owing to security considerations”. A few thousand residents in the Gaza Strip are defined as having “iron cast prevention orders” with their exit from Gaza being completely prohibited. In order to facilitate the exit of these individuals from Gaza, intense advocacy work is required on the part of HaMoked.

S.H. is a 75-year-old male resident from Hevrat Elarov in the Hebron district. S.H. has six daughters who are married to residents of the Gaza Strip and live in the Jabaliya camp. Since the end of 1997, HaMoked has been advocating on his behalf, when on almost each occasion, prolonged correspondence and endless telephone calls are required in order to arrange for him to visit his daughters. In the previous visit that was arranged for him in early November (shortly after the opening of the safe passage), HaMoked was also required to intervene in order to allow him to return from the Gaza Strip to his home: initially he was stopped at the Erez Crossing on the border, and was prevented from returning to Hebron.

4. Residency

Residency in Jerusalem

At first glance it appears as if the year 1999 signaled a turning point in the State’s policies in the area of residency rights in East Jerusalem. However aside from the many promising declarations that were voiced, in practice almost no real changes were felt. Some improvement was felt in the attitude of the clerks of the Ministry of Interior in East Jerusalem towards the Palestinian residents of the city, while changes to the actual rules and procedures were only reported at the end of January 2000. Even then, however there remained much uncertainty as to the exact nature of the new procedures, and should they indeed exist they had yet to be formally published. The discrepancy between the public declarations, reported in the newspapers, and the daily reality felt in the city, added to feelings of desperation and frustration. The need to be “fed” by rumors also did not contribute to the resident’s sense of security.

The slow change that is being signaled is the result of the pressure brought by human rights organizations and by the opinion of the world community. In addition there has been a growing acknowledgement on the part of the authorities that part of the actions that were implemented to evict the Palestinian population from Jerusalem brought the exact opposite result: migration of Palestinians back into the city in order to protect their status as residents. The Israeli perception of East Jerusalem as an integral part of Israel (and not as occupied territory) and the goal of maintaining a large Jewish majority in the city however remain intact. As a consequence discrimination against Palestinians and the pushing of Palestinians from the city continue. The authorities mobilize to serve these political-demographic goals through the manipulation of the planning and building laws, social