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Israel/OT: Israel must stop the construction of wall immediately

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Amnesty International is adding its voice to worldwide protests against Israel's construction of the fence/wall in the Occupied West Bank. The organization calls on the Israeli authorities to stop the construction of the fence/wall in the West Bank that is affecting the lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

Israeli, Palestinian and international organisations are participating in or supporting the "Stop the Wall Campaign" that has declared 9 November "the International Day of Action against the Wall". The week-long protests start on Sunday in many countries, including Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Jordan, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the USA.

"This fence/wall is having devastating economic and social consequences on the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, separating families and communities from each other and from their land and water - their most crucial assets," said Amnesty International.

Israel is continuing the construction of the fence/wall, with the second phase running even more deeply than the first phase into the West Bank. This is cutting many more thousands of Palestinians off from their land and essential services in nearby villages and towns and further restricting the movements of all Palestinians in these areas.

The Israeli authorities' claim that the fence/wall is being constructed to prevent potential Palestinian attackers from entering Israel to carry out suicide bombings and other attacks is not borne out by the reality on the ground. The fence/wall is not being constructed on the Green Line separating Israel from the West Bank, but mostly on Palestinian land several kilometres inside the West Bank, in order to isolate Palestinians away from Israeli settlements illegally built in the Occupied Territories.

"The construction of this fence/wall in its current location must be halted immediately," said Amnesty International. "As the fence/wall continues to snake through Palestinian land, more and more Palestinians find themselves trapped into enclaves and cantons, unable to have any semblance of a normal life."

"Israel has the right to take reasonable, necessary and proportionate measures to protect the security of its citizens and its borders. These include measures to prevent the entry into Israel of Palestinians or others who are reasonably suspected of intending to carry out suicide bombings or other attacks," Amnesty International said.

"However, Israel does not have a right to unlawfully destroy or confiscate Palestinian land and property and hinder the movements of Palestinians inside the Occupied Territories in order to consolidate its control over land which is being used for illegal Israeli settlements."

In order to build the fence/wall, large areas of mostly cultivated Palestinian land have been destroyed. The land on which it is constructed has been seized by the Israeli military authorities for "military needs". Although the seizure orders for the land are generally "temporary", usually until the end of 2005, they can be renewed indefinitely. Over the decades, Palestinian land "temporarily" seized by Israel has been used to build permanent structures, including settlements and roads for settlers, and has never been returned to its owners.

The very expensive and sophisticated structure of the fence/wall indicates that it is likely intended as a permanent structure. Affected Palestinians have to cross the fence/wall at designated checkpoints or gates to reach the rest of the West Bank - to go to work, to tend their fields, to sell their agricultural produce, and to access education and health centres in nearby towns and villages.

The Israeli authorities have consistently refused to provide advance information about the route of the fence/wall and information about the precise routing only become available when preparation work for the fence/wall begins on the ground or when the authorities deliver seizure orders to the local Palestinian communities whose land is going to be seized for the construction of the fence/wall.

For more information, please see:

Israel and the Occupied Territories: Surviving under siege: The impact of movement restrictions on the right to work, September 2003 (AI Index: MDE 15/001/2003)

Israel and the Occupied Territories: Surviving under siege: The impact of movement restrictions on the right to work: Executive Summary, September 2003 (AI Index: MDE 15/064/2003)

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