



UNITED NATIONS

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
occupied Palestinian territory**AREA C HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN FACT SHEET****August 2010****Background**

The Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) called for the phased transfer of power from the Israeli military and its civil administration to a Palestinian authority.<sup>1</sup> In 1993 the two parties agreed in principle to a temporary administrative division of the West Bank into three zones, referred to as Areas A, B and C. Two years later the second Oslo Accord, also known as the 1995 Interim Agreement specified details of the zoning.

Areas A and B make up roughly 38 percent of the West Bank: Area A includes the major Palestinian cities, and is under Palestinian civil and security authority. Area B comprises most Palestinian rural communities, and civil authority is under the Palestinian Authority, while security responsibilities are shared by both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities.

Approximately 62 percent of the area of the West Bank is in Area C, where Israel retains authority over law enforcement and control over the building and planning sphere. Although the Oslo Accords called for the gradual transfer of power and responsibility in the sphere of planning and zoning in Area C from the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) to the Palestinian Authority (PA), this transfer was frozen in 2000<sup>2</sup>.

The exact Palestinian population of Area C is unknown, but it is estimated that as many as 150,000<sup>3</sup> Palestinians live within the zone. A recent survey conducted by OCHA and partners indicates that a total of 271 communities have more than 50 percent of their built-up areas in Area C, including many which are entirely in Area C. Most of them are small herding communities scattered in remote areas, mainly on the eastern and southern slopes of the West Bank, and are some of the most vulnerable people in the West Bank.

In addition to its importance to those residing within its confines, Area C contains the land reserves critical for the sustainability of a future Palestinian state. Area C holds the only available space necessary for the expansion of Palestinian population centers as well as the bulk of Palestinian agricultural and grazing land. Because it is the only contiguous territorial block in the West Bank, large-scale infrastructure projects including national roads, water and electricity networks usually pass through it.

**Constraints**

In addition to the various physical and bureaucratic restrictions which affect Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, constraints specific to Area C include:

**Restrictive Planning and Zoning Policies**

Difficulties in obtaining building permits from the ICA for construction and/or rehabilitation of buildings, prevents the construction of housing to meet natural population growth. In addition, the inability to build or rehabilitate schools and health clinics significantly impedes the adequate provision of basic services. In some cases, permit applications of a high technical standard for funded projects have been pending for years. The ability to rehabilitate rainwater harvesting cisterns and the weatherproofing of dwellings, and even their replacement by portable tents, is prohibited by the ICA. Due to the restrictive planning and zoning regulations in practice, the Israeli authorities generally allow Palestinian construction only within the boundaries of ICA-approved municipal plans. These cover less than one percent of Area C, and much of this one percent is already built-up. As a result, Palestinians needing to build in Area C are left with no alternative than to build without a permit and risk demolition of their structure.<sup>4</sup>

**Demolitions and Displacement**

Between January and July 2010, 199 Palestinian structures, including 59 dwellings, have been in Area C, displacing 242 people and undermining the livelihoods of an additional 696 others. At least 64 percent of these demolitions took place in the month of July alone. In 2009, 891 Palestinians, including over 499 children, were displaced or otherwise affected for the same reasons.<sup>5</sup>

Although the lack of a building permit is the only official reason cited for ICA demolitions, in effect demolitions also occur during the enforcement of evacuation orders issued to those living in closed military zones. More than 33 percent of Area C has been declared as a close military zones leaving the 59 communities, most of whom have lived within them for decades, particularly vulnerable to summary demolitions.

Information provided by the Israeli Ministry of Defense in 2007 indicates that there were over 3,000 outstanding demolition orders for Area C structures; hundreds of new demolition orders have been issued since then.

**Access Restrictions**

The livelihoods of Area C residents are being eroded by Israeli-imposed closure obstacles that restrict access to transportation routes which are necessary to access basic services, and agricultural and grazing land. The lack of access to Area C land also impacts the lives of thousands of

Palestinians residing in Areas A and B, who depend on it for their livelihoods: for example, while most fertile land in the Jordan Valley is in Area C, it is owned by Palestinians who live in Area A and B in Nablus, Tubas and Jenin. Continued settlement and settlement outpost expansion<sup>6</sup> and the fencing off of large tracts of land within their vicinity, reduces Palestinian access to land, as Palestinians are prevented from entering settlement-adjacent areas. Herders also face access restrictions in nature reserves and closed military / fire zones. Some 18 percent of the West Bank, 33 percent of Area C, is "closed" for military training, or "firing zones." While Palestinian access to these areas is formally prohibited, enforcement of the restrictions varies.

## Settler Violence

Most settler-related violence in the West Bank occurs in Area C, and OCHA figures indicate that such violence is on the rise: the number of settler incidents resulting in either Palestinian casualties or property damage recorded in the first seven months of 2010 is more than twice the average of such incidents during the equivalent period in the previous four years – 161 compared to 83 incidents.<sup>7</sup> While the motivation for many incidents is not evident, it is clear that a large number of them reinforce settler control over certain areas of land resources in Area C.

## Water Scarcity

Palestinian communities living in Area C face ongoing water shortages due to a lack of rainfall in recent years, inadequate infrastructure and lack of equitable distribution of water resources. The problem is particularly serious in remote areas, given the reliance on herding and farming, which are water-dependent livelihoods. Many remote locations have no water networks and are far from public filling points leaving people with no alternative than to have water delivered by tankers. Transport costs increase the price of water far beyond what it is at source, which places a disproportionately heavy financial burden on families already noted for their poverty.

## Humanitarian Issues

Years of neglect, especially after the Oslo Accords, have left the people living in Area C in a desperate situation, isolated from other areas of the West Bank, and highly vulnerable to forcible displacement. Those that leave swell the numbers of aid-dependant urban poor in nearby towns. However, people continue to live in Area C, despite severe hardship, because herding or subsistence farming on land in Area C is their only livelihood option. The vulnerability of Area C populations has been highlighted by aid agencies as a serious humanitarian concern and a priority area for intervention in the 2010 Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP).

The humanitarian impact of the constraints highlighted above is significant and includes:

### Food insecurity and poor nutrition

The high level of food insecurity revealed by an interagency food security and nutrition assessment of 510 herder families in Area C, published in February 2010, is an indicator that a range of basic and essential humanitarian needs are currently unmet.<sup>8</sup>

The joint assessment found that 79 percent of the Palestinian herding population in Area C is food insecure, (as compared to an average of 25 percent for the general population in the West Bank and 61 percent in Gaza). In addition, 5.9 percent of surveyed children between the ages of six months and five years suffer from acute malnutrition, and 28 percent have stunted growth as a result of nutritional deficiencies. The erosion of herding livelihoods, due to lack of access to land and water scarcity, is a key factor behind the high levels of food insecurity. Moreover, the reduced access to traditional sources of meat and dairy products is directly impacting on the quality of nutrition.

### Lack of access to services

Limited access to education, water and health services is widespread throughout Area C. One major constraint is the lack or inadequate public service infrastructure due to the restrictive planning and permitting process. Other factors include closure obstacles, inadequate roads and the lack of transport systems in remote areas.

Abdel Rahim Bisharat, a herder living in Al Hadidiya in the Jordan Valley, supports an extended family of 27, including 18 children, with his flock of 340 sheep and goats as herding is his only source of livelihood. He needs 315-420 cubic meters of water per month to maintain his family and flocks during the summer. The nearest filling point, at Ein al Hilwa 5 km away, is closed to Palestinians<sup>9</sup> and so he must transport water from Ein Shibli 11 km away or Ein Al Beida, 27 km away. The cost of transport is very high. If he purchases from Ein Shibli he pays 6,600 NIS a month; however by this route the truck must cross Hamra checkpoint where the tanker may be denied access. Alternatively, he can transport water from Ein Al Beida for a higher cost of 14,400 NIS a month, in order to avoid the checkpoint. The maximum cost of the same amount of water at source is 1,890 NIS per month. Over the last three years Abdel Rahim has been forced to sell 150 sheep (31 percent of his flock) to cover expenses, and he is sinking further into debt.

The threat of physical violence from settlers, especially against students on their way to school presents another impediment on the access to basic services. For example, attacks by settlers from Maon outpost, on 5 – 10-year-old children walking to school from Tuba and Maghayir Al Abeed to Tuwani, were so frequent that an army jeep is needed to escort the children to and from school.

## Shelter

Many families in the 271 Area C communities live in tents, caves or corrugated tin shack dwellings. Increased poverty resulting from the erosion of herding livelihoods and the threat of demolitions has made it increasingly difficult for families to maintain their dwellings and keep them weatherproof. In many cases, large extended families live together in a cave or one-room shack.

In Masafer Yatta, Hebron, Ali H.<sup>10</sup>, his wife, and five unmarried children - three of whom are teenage girls - and his married son, with his wife and three children, all live and sleep together in one room. The room, made of one meter high stone walls and a palm frond roof, is 25 meters square. The family has no alternative accommodation, as their small house in Yatta is occupied by two other married sons and their young families. Because the land they live on is their only asset, and the entire family depends on herding for their livelihood, Ali and his family have been forced to stay despite the trauma of having their room demolished by the ICA three times over the last eight years. The family has a new tent, which would provide a separate space for the married son, his wife and their children but they are afraid to erect it in case it would draw the attention of the ICA and result in the demolition of both the old and new structures.

A recent survey of living conditions in South Hebron hills,<sup>11</sup> shows that this type of intense overcrowding is common, with 30 percent of dwellings housing more than one family in the same space, and 41 percent of individuals having less than 3.5 square meters of living space per person.<sup>12</sup> Many live in caves which are poorly ventilated and often have mould on the walls and ceilings. Such conditions lack even a semblance of dignity and have a profound psychological impact especially on young married women and teenage girls. Families are exposed to rain and frost in winter and to very high temperatures in summer posing serious health concerns, particularly for the most vulnerable, children and the elderly.

## Humanitarian Response Plan

An initial response plan was developed by the humanitarian community at the end of 2009 and submitted to the ICA in January 2010. Although far from comprehensive<sup>14</sup>, it aims to ensure that communities have access to minimum amounts of water, primary education and basic shelter. The plan focuses on the areas where the ability to address needs is restricted by Israeli policies, in relation to infrastructure, or where direct interventions by the Israeli authorities is required, for example to stop settler violence against school children in Area C. Thus essential food aid is not included in the plan because food distribution is being implemented smoothly.

The response plan has been closely coordinated with the relevant PA agencies, including the Ministry of Education and the Palestinian Water Authority to ensure that it is consistent with the PA plans for medium and longer term development.

In July 2010 the ICA provided a written response in relation to the water component of the response plan. The education and shelter components have yet to be responded to.

### Water, sanitation and hygiene sector (WaSH)

The WASH component of the plan consists of a package of fourteen projects to serve an approximate population of 52,000, which has been identified as the most vulnerable and in urgent need of water assistance. The target population pay more than 20 NIS per cubic meter and/or has a consumption average of less than 60 liters per person/day, whereas the average cost of water at source is 4.5 NIS per cubic meter and the World Health Organisation recommend a minimum quantity 100 liters per person/day. The proposed projects include the establishment of water filling points, rehabilitation of water networks and wells, and the provision of communal water storage tanks, with the objective of reducing water costs and increasing the volume of water from existing sources.

Since January 2010, one of the 14 projects has been implemented. Written approval from the ICA has been received for four, and verbal approval for an additional three, while the status of the remaining projects is unclear.<sup>13</sup>

### Education

Twenty-six schools have been assessed by humanitarian organizations as sub-standard and in need of a swift humanitarian response. Inadequacies include unsafe or unhygienic facilities, schools facing the threat of demolition, attacks on students, and restrictions on access to and from school. Assessments by aid agencies<sup>15</sup> indicate a high drop-out rate, particularly among girls, and significant health and safety risks for the students that continue to attend the 26 schools.

The following measures are necessary to address the most pressing needs of the 26 schools:

- Lifting of demolition or stop-work orders on 10 schools.
- Structural repairs or additions to address inadequate basic hygiene facilities such as toilets and drinking water in 22 schools;
- Providing protection to students from five schools that face regular settler violence en route to school.
- Preventing delays at check points, including the prompt issuing of permits where these are required, for teachers to access schools in a timely manner.

Since January 2010, only one of the 22 infrastructure projects in the education package has received a building permit, while one of the other schools has received an additional demolition order against a temporary classroom.

### Shelter

Weatherproofing of non-permanent shelters, such as tents and shacks, is urgently needed to provide protection from extremes of cold and heat. In addition, each family needs an independent living area; those living in overcrowded quarters, especially in caves, need to expand their living space. Implementation of the shelter component of the Response Plan will be undertaken by individual householders with material and some technical support from aid agencies. Repair and rehabilitation of existing dwellings or their replacement with tents require limited technical skills which are commonly available in Area C communities.

The following actions and measures are needed to address the most pressing shelter needs: □□ Implementation of a moratorium on demolitions in Area C.

- Unobstructed installation of new portable tents—one dwelling unit per family, to replace structures that can not be weatherproof or which constitute a health risk and/or provide space according to minimum Sphere standards.
- Unobstructed weatherproofing of existing shelters.

The Humanitarian Response Plan package contains critical priority projects, all of which require urgent and immediate implementation. The result of the Israeli authorities' failure to facilitate implementation of the Plan will result in Palestinian communities left with a chronic lack of water, children educated in unsafe and inappropriate facilities, and families living in inadequate shelters or facing the risk of displacement due to house demolitions.

In the absence of ICA facilitation of permits or alternative mechanisms, humanitarian actors are repeatedly forced to choose between respecting the military legislation of the ICA, or meeting the critical needs of people.

## The Way Forward

As the occupying power, Israel is responsible, under International Humanitarian Law, for ensuring that the basic needs of the occupied population are met. In Area C, a number of essential measures are urgently required of the Israeli authorities to improve the humanitarian situation, including ceasing demolitions and ensuring that Palestinian planning needs are met; opening up areas currently off-limit to Palestinian development, including closed military zones and nature reserves; and the complete and permanent freezing of all settlement activity. An important complementary step towards addressing the economic, agricultural and water needs of Palestinians in the West Bank would be the transfer of control of parts of Area C to the PA, as envisaged in the Interim (Oslo) Agreement. These steps would contribute to ensuring compliance with international law and UN resolutions and lay the groundwork for a durable political solution in the oPt.

In advance of steps recommended above, it is expected that the Government of Israel will immediately facilitate essential work to meet humanitarian needs among the communities and land in Area C, including:

- The reinstitution of a moratorium on all demolitions in Area C;
- The expedited rehabilitation of existing infrastructure, or the addition of new infrastructure needed to meet the urgent WASH and education priorities identified;
- The issuance of permits to teachers to allow easy passage to work places in Area C, and ensure that they are not delayed at checkpoints;

- □ The protection of students from attacks and harassment by settlers;
- □ The authorization of unconditional weather proofing and structural repairs to existing shelter units within Area C, without the requirement to obtain permits.

## Endnotes

1. The Declaration of Principles on Interim Self Government Arrangements (Oslo I) was signed in 1993 and was intended to be a first step in a phased process. The two parties agreed to the division of the West Bank (with the exception of East Jerusalem) into three areas: A, B and C. In 1995 the second Oslo Accord, also known as the Interim Agreement was signed.
2. Interim Agreement, article 27.2, related to Planning and Zoning: "In Area C, powers and responsibilities related to the sphere of Planning and Zoning will be transferred gradually to Palestinian jurisdiction that will cover West Bank and Gaza Strip territory except for the issues that will be negotiated in the permanent status negotiations, during the further redeployment phases, to be completed within 18 months from the date of the inauguration of the Council."
3. The division of the West Bank into Areas A, B and C did not correspond to the built-up area of Palestinian communities. There are over 400 Palestinian villages that have some part of their built up area in Area C. Area C population figures have been estimated by UN OCHA oPt as 150,000, using Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) data. This estimate is based on an aggregation of (a) the total population of communities entirely located in Area C with (b) an estimate, based on percentage of built up area of each community in Area C as a proportion of total population.
4. UN OCHA oPt, Restricting Space: The Planning Regime Applied by Israel in the Area C of the West Bank, Dec., 2009.
5. UN OCHA oPt, Protection of Civilians Database July 31, 2010
6. UN OCHA oPt, West Bank Movement and Access Report, June 2010.
7. UN OCHA oPt, Protection of Civilian Database to July 27, 2010 and OCHA, Israeli Settler Violence and the Evacuation of Outposts. November 2009.
8. UNRWA, WFP and UNICEF - Food Security and Nutrition Assessment, February 2010
9. The opening of this filling point is one of the package of 15 water projects contained in the Human Response Plan.
10. The surname of the case study family is withheld to protect their anonymity.
11. GVC- Improving living conditions and sanitation for herding dependant communities in the Southern West Bank ,May, 2010
12. 'Sphere' are a set international minimum standards used to guide a response during a humanitarian crisis. Sphere standards should be met to save lives at the onset of a crisis and are far below standards required for sustained living. The Sphere standard for living space is 3.5 m2 per person.
13. The current status of the 14 projects is as follows: 1 well rehabilitation is complete; 4 filling points have been given writing approval and are in process of implementation; verbal approval has been given for the rehabilitation of 2 wells and 1 water network, but implementation can't move ahead without written approval; 2 filling points are under consideration; 1 filling point has been refused; and there has been no response to date regarding the installation of small storage tanks in 2 locations.
14. The situation in Area C is dynamic and the packages of projects included in the Plan will be periodically reviewed and updated to reflect any changes in circumstances and needs. In cases where improvements are noted projects will be removed. Likewise as new needs are identified projects will be added.
15. The Education Cluster, a coordination group lead by UNICEF has consolidated data from field assessments undertaken by various cluster members.