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September Overview

Events in September highlighted a number of factors contributing to the vulnerability of the lives and livelihoods of many Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).

September witnessed a serious escalation in Israeli settler violence resulting in one Palestinian killed and 68 others injured, a family of twelve displaced, and nearly 2,500 trees burnt, cut down, or otherwise vandalized. Other developments in September related to settler activities highlighted the long-standing and pervasive lawlessness underlying the phenomenon of settler violence. These include the closure without indictment of an investigation into a serious settler attack that was video-recorded in 2008, as well as the official announcement by Israeli authorities of their intention to "legalize" one large settlement in the Ramallah area (Ofra), which was built without building permits, mostly on private Palestinian land. In the northern West Bank, the livelihoods of hundreds of Palestinian families in three villages were also undermined due to the demolition by the Israeli authorities of six water wells, on the grounds that the wells were dug without permission by the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee. The wells were used for the irrigation of approximately 3,000 dunums of farmland. To cope with the water shortfall, some affected farmers have resorted to the use of storm water runoff and untreated raw sewage for irrigation, creating an environmental health hazard. Of additional concern, the demolished wells were located in Area B, where under the Interim Agreement of 1995, planning powers has been under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority.

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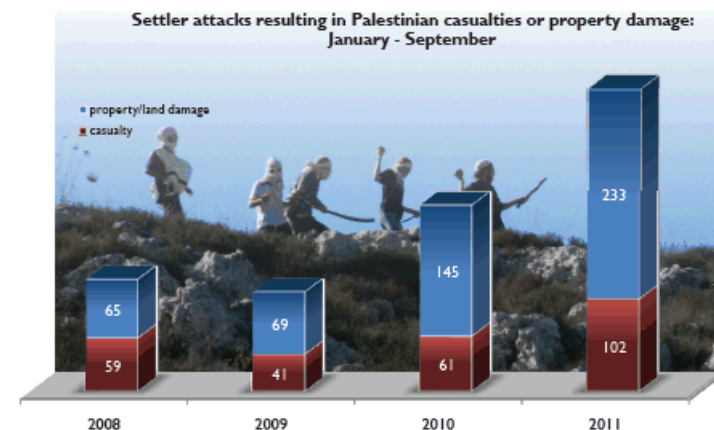
The severe funding deficit facing UNRWA, which supports more than two-thirds of Gaza's population, has had a detrimental effect on the already severe humanitarian conditions in that part of the oPt. The funding shortfall, estimated at USD 36 million, has forced UNRWA to reduce or suspend a number of programmes related to job creation, food assistance, education and counseling. Beyond the immediate impact, Gaza, given that UNRWA employs some 9 percent of Gaza's workforce, the cuts are expected to negatively affect unemployment rates in the coming months, increasing the risk of humanitarian vulnerability.

As the occupying power, the Government of Israel is ultimately responsible for the protection and wellbeing of the Palestinian population in the oPt. Exercising this responsibility requires serious action to enforce the law on Israeli settlers, who reside illegally in the West Bank according to international law. Unilateral actions targeting the property and livelihoods of protected civilians, such as the destruction of water wells, must also stop.

Settler violence on the rise

September's events highlight the absence of the rule of law

September witnessed a sharp escalation in Israeli settler violence, reflected both in the number of incidents and their increasing impact. During the month, OCHA recorded a total of 73 incidents that resulted in either Palestinian injuries or damage to Palestinian property. Excluding March 2011,¹ this was the largest number of settler attacks resulting in casualties or property damage recorded in a single month since January 2006, when OCHA began systematically recording settler-related incidents. Moreover, September's escalation followed an upward trend in settler violence: since the beginning of 2011, a total of 335 such incidents was recorded, constituting a 63 and 205 percent increase, compared with the equivalent period in 2010 and 2009 respectively.



Many of the attacks during the month were perpetrated in the context of the so-called “price tag” strategy, in connection to the demolition of a few structures in two unauthorized settlement outposts (Mgiron and Ramat Mgiron) in the Ramallah governorate by the Israeli authorities.² The submission of the Palestinian request for UN membership also triggered a number of attacks.

Overall, during the month one Palestinian was killed and 68 others were injured either by Israeli settlers or by the Israeli military in the course of incidents involving Israeli settlers, and nearly 2,500 trees were vandalized, among other incidents. In the same context, one Israeli settler and his 18-month-old son were killed this month in a car crash, after the driver was hit by stones thrown by Palestinians, and another three settlers were injured by Palestinians in other incidents. Also this month, an 8-year-old Palestinian child resident of Hebron City was hit and killed by a vehicle driven by an Israeli settler when crossing Road 60.

The displacement of vulnerable communities as a result of settler violence is an issue of increasing concern. In one of the incidents this month (9 September), Israeli settlers set fire to a residential tent in the herder community of Susiya in the Hebron governorate, injuring one Palestinian and displacing a family of twelve. Earlier this year (July), an entire herder community in the Ramallah governorate (Al Baqa’a) was forcibly displaced due to recurrent settler attacks.

The surge in settler violence in recent months has taken place against the background of a long-standing and pervasive lawlessness and impunity vis-à-vis settler activities. This is reflected in the failure to prevent attacks; even though most of September’s incidents occurred in areas that are regularly targeted by settlers, at times when violence could be reasonably expected to occur (during outpost demolitions and around the time of the UN bid), measures adopted on the ground by the Israeli army were largely insufficient and/or inadequate to prevent or reduce the scope of attacks.

CASE STUDY – QUSRA VILLAGE

Qusra is a village of about 4,700 located in the southeastern section of Nablus Governorate. Since the early 1980s the village has lost over 170 dunums of land for the construction of the adjacent Migdalim settlement. The residents of the village suffer from regular attacks by Israeli settlers, mainly from two nearby outposts (Esh Kodesh and Kida), which have increased in quantity and gravity in recent months. These incidents have severely undermined the physical security and livelihoods of the residents of Qusra.

Between January and September 2011, OCHA recorded a total of 16 incidents resulting in casualties or property damage, perpetrated in the village by Israeli settlers. In the course of these incidents one Palestinian was killed and 50 others (including seven children) were injured. The majority of the casualties were caused by IDF forces intervening in clashes that erupted following initial settler attacks; these include a 37-year-old farmer, father of seven, killed on 23 September during such a clash. In terms of property losses, incidents recorded in 2011 resulted in nearly 1,300 trees being damaged, two vehicles set on fire, four animals killed and one mosque damaged.

Fat-hallah Abu Ridah, a farmer who sustained damage in a settler attack on 6 October, told OCHA:

“I consider these 80 damaged trees to be like my children. My wife and I planted them 15 years ago, and have been raising them together with our children. My wife and my daughter used to carry the water on their heads and walk over 300 meters in order to irrigate these trees, while myself and the children spent over three years collecting stones from the land to build these small stone walls all around in order to protect the land. We have always tried to protect our land and our trees, but this time they came at night. The Israeli forces restrict our movements in the village in order to protect the settlers while they damage our land. This is the fifth time this has happened; around 20 days ago the settlers shot me in my leg with live ammunition, and also hit my two sons”.



Fat-hallah Abu Ridah, a farmer with 80 olive trees damaged by settler violence;

Photo by OCHA, October 2011

Another dimension is the failure to hold perpetrators accountable for acts of violence and other violations of the law. This month, the Israeli State Attorney rejected an appeal submitted by the Israeli human rights group B’Tselem against the closure of a police investigation into a grave settler assault from June 2008, on the grounds of “offender unknown”. That attack, which was video-recorded, occurred in the herder community of Susya, the same community attacked this month (see above). According to B’Tselem, which obtained the file of the investigation, the police failed to carry out elementary investigative actions that could have led to the identification and prosecution of the masked perpetrators, such as questioning the owner of the farm from which the assailants reportedly came, comparing the sticks that had been taken at the scene to those that were seized at the farm, and using the video footage to identify the perpetrators.

A third element is the attempt to retroactively “legalize” blatantly illegal acts. On 15 September, the Israeli State Attorney informed the High Court of Justice of its intention to prepare a “demarcation map” for the settlement of Ofra (population over 3,300) in the Ramallah Governorate. Since the majority of the settlement was built on privately-owned Palestinian land, officially registered in the land registry in the name of residents from the neighboring villages of ‘Ein Yabrud and Silwad, no master plan could be issued. Therefore all the settlement’s houses lack building permits.³ The recently announced step has the explicit aim of initiating the process of “legalizing” both the settlement (under Israeli law) and the seizure of privately owned Palestinian land.

Israeli authorities carry out demolitions of water infrastructure

Hundred of Palestinian families affected in the northern West Bank

In September, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) carried out the demolition of six artesian water wells in the villages of An Nassariya, Beit Hassan, and Al Bqai'a, in the northern West Bank; three of these structures were demolished for the second time in less than three months. None of the owners of the wells received any notification or demolition orders.

Each of the demolished wells was used for the irrigation of roughly 500 dunums of farmland, and more than 400 Palestinian families were affected. Of particular concern, following the demolitions, there are reports that some of the farmers have resorted to diverting sewage stream through storm water flooding channel as a coping mechanism, and are using raw sewage for the irrigation of vegetable crops.

The Israeli demolition of water infrastructure in the West Bank has been of ongoing concern. From the beginning of 2009 to date, 48 rainwater cisterns and 38 wells have been demolished, half of which were recorded this year alone (24 cisterns and 19 wells in 2011) affecting more than 14,000 people, over half of whom are children.⁴ The demolition of cisterns in these areas means the loss of their primary coping mechanism, especially in times of water scarcity.

The wells demolished this month were dug without the approval of the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee (JWC), as required under the Oslo Interim Agreement of 1995. However, according to the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA), although it had agreed before the JWC to shut down the wells, it conditioned its agreement upon the provision of an alternate source of water to the affected communities, which has not yet occurred. Moreover, in contrast to previous demolitions of water infrastructure, all of this month's demolitions were carried out in Area B of the West Bank. Unlike in Area C, under the Interim Agreement planning and building powers in Area B lie with the Palestinian Authority. Therefore, it remains unclear under which authority did the ICA carried out these demolitions.

The demolitions occurred within the context of long-standing discriminatory allocation of water resources in the West Bank is made clear given the preferential water resource distribution provided to Israeli settlements located in the same areas. While Israeli settlements receive an average 280 liters per day per capita, the Palestinian population is allocated an average of 60 liters per day per capita, well below the recommended 100 liters as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

CASE STUDY ON DEMOLITION OF WELLS IN AN NASSARIYA

An Nassariya is a rural community in Area B the Nablus governorate, whose residents rely heavily on agriculture. On 8 September 2011, Israeli forces destroyed three of the village's wells with a bulldozer. The army confiscated pumps, engines, filters and 4 000 liters of gasoline (at 7 NIS per litre), and threw the owners' tools into the wells. They did not show a demolition order to anybody present. The demolition affected the livelihoods of 350 families.

Testimony of Nagahe Zaad (54), farmer:

"I plant tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, melon, aubergine, peppers and many other things. Our sheep eat the foliage after we have harvested. Now we have no water and we cannot plant and our sheep drink the sewage water from the open canal."

"When it happened, I just stood there. I felt so angry, but there was nothing I could do. It took about three to four hours and it all happened right before my eyes. No one was allowed to enter the area. I was thinking of all the other farmers who depend on the water. I fell to the ground and was taken to a doctor."

"We are willing to live with Israelis and we will share our water. I along with the two other owners of wells have decided that we shall now rebuild only one well, so we can share the costs. But this means that we will produce less, and we know the Israelis will destroy our wells again, but I have been a farmer all my life. My father and grandfather also farmed on this land. We now live with this, we will not move."

Testimony given to the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), Yanoun team

The funding crisis at UNRWA

More than two thirds of Gaza's population severely affected

UNRWA's emergency operations in Gaza are facing a severe funding deficit of US\$ 36 million that has already forced the agency to reduce or suspend a range of programmes in the areas of job creation, food assistance, education and counseling. If no additional funds are raised in the upcoming weeks, the number of affected beneficiaries will increase dramatically as of the beginning of 2012.

Currently, UNRWA has more than 167,000 outstanding Job Creation Program (JCP) applicants seeking temporary employment assistance. After an initial 30 percent decline in the number of rolling contracts (from 10,000 to 6,500) in June 2011, on 1 September the new contracts ceased altogether. Given that JCP's employees make a significant share of UNRWA's staff, including half of the staff in health centers, 1,500 remedial teachers, and more than 2,000 garbage collectors, the recent cuts have affected the capacity of the agency to deliver services. As UNRWA accounts for some 9 percent of the total employment in Gaza, the recent developments are likely to be reflected in the overall unemployment rate for the second half of 2011, after it showed a significant decrease (from 37.4 to 25.5 percent) in the first half of the year.

UNRWA provides 240,000 abject poor who live on less than 1.60 USD per day with three quarters of their basic daily caloric needs and over 400,000 additional living on less than 4 USD per day with rations that met 40 percent of their basic daily caloric needs. An additional 220,000 children are provided with nutritional supplementary school feeding. Unless the funding gaps are filled, these programs will be suspended as of January 2012.

The reduction in food assistance will require already extremely vulnerable households to fill the deficit in their household budgets at a time when food prices continue to soar, further exacerbating their food insecure situation and ability to cope.

Dependency on humanitarian aid in Gaza has been exacerbated as a result of the economic collapse that resulted from the Israeli blockade of Gaza, imposed since 2007. While the easing of the blockade since June 2010, along with increasing tunnel activity, has triggered some economic recovery, ongoing restrictions on imports and exports, as well as on access to farming land and fishing waters have continued to undermine the livelihoods of the population and render a significant part of the population dependent on humanitarian assistance.

Impediments to education in Jerusalem area

With the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year, there are ongoing concerns that Palestinian children living in East Jerusalem are not being afforded adequate resources to meet their educational needs. Education in East Jerusalem remains under the direct responsibility of the Israeli authorities. Widespread classroom shortages and substandard conditions in schools remain of high concern.⁵ The municipal school system is unable to absorb all school children in East Jerusalem, and every year thousands of Palestinian children are turned away. For those students who do have a spot, double shifting is common, and schools are often forced to hold classes in rented houses that do not meet basic educational and health standards.⁶ Currently, six schools in East Jerusalem have structures with outstanding demolition orders.

And yet, community attempts to address the insufficient resources allocated to the Palestinian student population by the Jerusalem Municipality are often met with numerous bureaucratic and other systemic obstacles, preventing them from filling the gap in educational needs.

“Almost every other day, Palestinians from the other side of the Wall, which encloses the school play area, jump over seeking to enter Jerusalem. And, almost immediately, Israeli troops follow, without warning and usually accompanied by trained dogs, enter the school and begin searching the grounds, classrooms and bathrooms.”

— Karima Khatib, Comboni Nursery, Abu Dis, East Jerusalem

For example, in September, Israeli authorities carried out a series of actions targeting three kindergartens in the Jerusalem area, affecting over 130 Palestinian children. One kindergarten in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Al Thouri (Abu Tour) was prevented by the Israeli authorities from opening at the beginning of the school year, due to allegations of affiliation to Hamas. Another kindergarten, located along the Barrier in Abu Dis, faced continued raids by Israeli forces searching for Palestinians who breach the Israeli Barrier. A third kindergarten established by the Bedouin community in Anata, which is located in the Area C part of the Jerusalem Governorate, is under threat of demolition, following receipt of demolition orders from the Israeli Civil Administration.

Under international law, all children are entitled to receive education in a safe and adequate learning environment. As the occupying Power, Israel has an obligation to protect civilian infrastructure, including schools, and to facilitate the proper working of all institutions that are devoted to the care and education of children. The demolition, closure or raiding of schools and kindergartens run counter to this obligation.

CASE STUDY: THE COMBONI NURSERY

The kindergarten is located in Abu Dis in East Jerusalem, and has been open since 1966. The outer wall of the playground forms part of the Israeli Barrier itself. Immediately abutting the school is an Israeli military installation, with a checkpoint and observation tower. Up until the end of the 2008-2009 school year, the checkpoint was a gate in the Barrier, and Israeli forces would open the door and allow the children through to the Kindergarten. However, since the gate was upgraded to a checkpoint-like structure in mid-2009, access has been completely forbidden, except for medical emergencies and funerals, and now children who used to commute a very short distance to their school, have to enter Jerusalem by foot through Az-Zaytoun checkpoint, taking two buses to complete the hour-long detour.

Testimony of teacher Karima Khatib :

“I live in Al ‘Eizariya and accompany six children from the village through Zaytoun checkpoint to come here. A bus takes us from Al ‘Eizariya to the checkpoint, we cross it by foot, and another bus picks us up from the other side and drives us to school. In the mornings, the checkpoint is full of adults trying to get to work, so there is often a lot of pushing and shoving, and the kids, who are only three and four-year-olds, and are often crushed in the heavy foot traffic.

Two years ago, the trip was easier and much shorter; many of the parents would just drop off their kids at the gate next to the school, and we also had a whole busload of children, in all, 56 children coming from Al ‘Eizariya. Last year, the number went down to 11 children, and since the beginning of this school year (5 September), we’re down to six children coming from the other side of the Wall. The journey usually takes about an hour in the morning, and transportation to the school has become very expensive—whereas before the closure of the checkpoint next door, it used to cost about 1400 NIS each child for the year to travel from Al ‘Eizariya to the school, now it costs more than 4000 NIS. Also, the soldiers manning the checkpoint can be rude and insulting, and sometimes make it difficult for us to pass. For example, once last year they demanded that I show them the birth certificates of the 11 children who I was with! I tried to explain to them that I can’t produce such documents, because I’m not their mother—I’m their teacher. For a long time they wouldn’t listen, however, after a long wait, they finally let us through. This year, we were hoping that the Israelis would again allow us to use the checkpoint next door, but so far this hasn’t happened.

However, access to the school isn’t our only problem. Almost every other day, because the Wall, which also encloses the school play area, is of lower height than is usually the case in other areas, Palestinians jump over the Wall to enter Jerusalem, and enter through a gap in the fence. There is an electronic sensor on the Wall, and almost immediately, Israeli troops, without warning and usually accompanied by trained dogs, enter the school and begin searching the grounds, classrooms and bathrooms. Just this last week, I was surprised by a tall Israeli soldier, and a police dog, searching the school grounds. I just froze; it was frightening. I can’t tell you how many times Israeli troops have entered this last month, but it happens at least 2-3 times a week.

Endnotes

1. During March 2011, OCHA recorded 78 settler incidents, most of them following the killing of five members of one family in Itamar settlement.
2. The “price tag” strategy entails, primarily, the targeting of Palestinians and their property with the aim of deterring the Israeli authorities from enforcing the law on settlers, particularly the demolition of structures and/or evacuation of settlement outposts.
3. B’Tselem, *The Ofra Settlement – An Unauthorized Outpost*, December 2008.
4. OCHA, July 2011
5. Knesset Research and Information Centre, *The Education System in East Jerusalem: Classrooms and Curricula*, May 2000, cited in ACRI, Ir Amim, *Failed Grade*, p. 6. ‘More than a quarter of all of the nonstandard classrooms (188 of 647) are defined as classrooms in an ‘unsuitable condition,’ about one fifth (157) are defined as being in a ‘fair condition’ and only 155 are in a ‘suitable condition’; another 147 nonstandard classrooms operate in rooms intended to be ‘appendix rooms.’ *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. See OCHA oPt Fact Sheet, Bedouin Relocation: Threat of Forced Displacement in the Jerusalem Periphery, October 2011.

CONTRIBUTING AGENCIES

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Relief and Works Agency

for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), Al Haq, Badil, Save the Children (UK), Defence for Children International – Palestine Section (DCI-PS), Oxfam GB, Palestine Hydrology Group (PHG), Campaign for the Right to Enter, Action Against Hunger (ACF),

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