

Parliamentary Mission to Palestine

13th - 17th April 2004

PALESTINIAN SUFFERINGS: « Hopeless, Jobless, Homeless »



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Program

Tuesday April 13th:

- Arrival in Tel Aviv at 3pm
- 5pm: Meeting with **Mrs Véronique Petit, First secretary of the Belgian Embassy** and **Mr Gino Nale – Economic and Commercial Attaché at the Brussels and Walloon Regions Trade Office**

Wednesday April 14th:

- 10am: Arrival in **Qalqilya**, a Palestinian village of the West Bank surrounded but the Israeli wall.
Meeting with **Dr Mohammed Aboushi of the UPMRC** (The Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees) and analysis of the soci-economic and medical consequences of the wall on the region.
- 11am: Meeting with **Mr Zahran, Mayor of Qalqilya**.
- Noon: Meeting with **Mr Mustafa Al-Malki, Governor of Qalqilya**
- 1pm: Visit of the wall around Qalqilya
- 3pm: Visit of **Jayyous** and meeting with **Mr Hassan Fayez, Mayor of Jayyous**
- 5pm: Back to Jerusalem.
- 6pm: Meeting with **Mr Albert Alghazarian, Professor at Birzeit University (Ramallah)**
- 7pm: Diner offered by **Mr Guido Courtois, Consul of Belgium in Jerusalem** with the company of **Mr Marc Otte, Special Representative for the EU in the Middle East**

Thursday April 15th:

- 9.30am: Meeting with **President Yasser Arafat**.
- 11am: Meeting in the Foreign Office of the Palestinian Authority with **Mr Ilan Halevi, Deputy Foreign Minister** et **Mrs Samia Bamieh, Director of the European Department**
- Noon: Demonstration « **Free Marwan Bargouthi** »
- 2pm: Arrival in **Naplous**
- 3pm-5pm: Visit of the old city, meeting with **Professor Ayman Annimer from « Voice of An-Najah » radio** (University of An-Najah), visit of **Balata refugee camp**
- 8pm: Diner offered by **Mr Jean Brétéché, Delegate of the European Commission in Palestine**

Friday April 16th:

- 9am: Arrival in Gaza
- 9.30am: Welcoming by **Mrs Marianne Blume, Belgian Professor in Al-Azhar University** and **Mr Amjad Al-Shawa from PNGO**
- 11am: Arrival in **Rafah**, meeting with **Mr Saied Fathi Zouroub, Mayor of Rafah**. Visit of the demolished houses on the borderline between Rafah and Egypt
- 2pm: Visit of **Al-Toufah checkpoint in Khan Younis**
- 4pm: Meeting with **Dr Haidar Abdel Shafi, Chairman of the Red Croissant**
- 6pm: Back to Jerusalem
- 8pm: **Reception offered by the members of the Parliament**

Saturday April 17th:

- Back to Belgium early in the morning

Members of the Parliamentary Mission

This mission was organised by Pierre Galand, Member of the Belgian Parliament and Chairman of the Belgo-Palestinian Association, Naim Khader Fondation.

Were participating in the mission:

The Senators :

Sfia Bouarfa
Jacinta De Roeck
Jean Cornil
Pierre Galand ;

The Deputies:

Karine Lalieux
Mohammed Boukourna
Alain Mathot

Were joining the mission:

Marielle Papy and Nora Khalefeh, parliamentary assistants
Joël Mathieu, Gsara
Gabrielle Lefèvre, journalist

Introduction

Before it is too late

From Tuesday April 13 to Saturday April 17, 2004, our delegation composed of seven Members of Parliament, two Parliamentary Assistants, one expert in communication and one journalist visited Palestine, Jerusalem, the West Bank (Ramallah, Naplouse, Qalqilya) and the Gaza Strip.

Many thanks to all those, men and women who enabled us to accomplish that mission, that “Descent into Hell” to meet with a martyred people, victim of a war and colonial occupation dating from another age.

Our apologies go in particular to those, who saw us, shouted their despair and maybe had the feeling that we were merely passing by.

Our report is intended as a cry, an appeal to universal consciousness, a questioning addressed to our colleagues, a contribution to the struggle that must be fought to compel the international community to finally act in order to guarantee the protection of the victims of that dirty war, so that Israeli soldiers and settlers shall withdraw from occupied Palestine - Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem - and that negotiations according to the norms and resolutions founding international law shall overcome.

The urgency to act is so obvious that there is no excuse to abstain.

Done in Brussels on the 25 th of April 2004

*Sfia Bouarfa
Mohammed Boukourna
Jean Cornil
Jacinta De Roeck
Pierre Galand
Karine Lalioux
Alain Mathot
Marielle Papy
Nora Khalefeeb
Joël Mathieu
Gabrielle Lefèvre*

Account

by Gabrielle Lefèvre

I. The stolen water of Qalqilya



A nice city that was prosperous and lived without animosity towards its Israeli neighbours. Agriculture was flourishing in Qalqilya as well as trade. Then, concrete suddenly appeared : the erection of a wall eight meters high with miradors guarded by soldiers, machine-guns in their hand; checkpoints open only for a few minutes every days and not always at the same hours. A population of 45,000 inhabitants was locked in a gigantic concentration camp, cut from its hinterland of 32 villages counting some 40,000 people. All this because of the settlements that Israel strengthens in the occupied territory. In addition, on a major ground water reservoir (1,795 sq.km), the biggest and wealthiest in Palestine (53 % of water resources) that serves in the present situation to satisfy 25 % of the water needs of Israelis. A large scale theft made possible by a policy of apartheid carefully elaborated and implemented with unbelievable brutality.

Therefore, Qalqilya is victim of its strategic position. Since 1948, Israel has attempted to occupy the city but has run against the resistance of its inhabitants. During the war in June 1967, the city was largely destroyed but later rebuilt owing to the protection of the members of the Security Council. The new plan established by Israel is to force inhabitants to leave the city it is ruthlessly stifling. Nevertheless, Palestinians and Israelis were living rather quietly until 2000 when occurred only one terrorist attack originated in the town. This was due to the increase of the Israeli settlements. Today, they number 25 and include 53,790 settlers spread around the city on Palestinian territories. In order to “protect” them, the Israeli government decided to build a wall made of concrete and barbed wire, from 13th June 2002. The length is 13,606 m and it stands on a “cleaned” area (cultures destroyed, trees pulled out, houses and shops razed) of 53 to 104 meters wide..

Health conditions are deteriorating

Our visit to Qalqilya started at the Health Center of the UPMRC (Union of Palestinian Relief Committees) and was guided by **Dr Ahmed Aboushi**, district manager. Women, elderly people and children were expecting the dentist and general practitioners. The Center has essentially a function of primary care for the treatment of chronic diseases, dermatitis, stomatitis, teeth. It also assists handicapped people and facilitates their revalidation. In addition, it deals with school medicine.

The most serious emergencies were referred to the hospitals of Naplouse and Ramallah... before the city was trapped! Emergencies also came in from the neighbouring villages... before the wall was erected. "We feel the pressure of occupation" explains Dr. Ahmed Aboushi. More than 65 % of farmers live on less than 300 USD per month. Many Palestinian merely survive only through the food aid of the Red Cross and United Nations. Because of the loss of jobs, poverty and isolation, stress is increasing as well as family abuse. More than 10 % of children suffer from malnutrition: they need milk and animal proteins. In 2003, we noted problems concerning drug supplies: insulin, psychiatric medications, drugs to cure chronic diseases such as bronchial asthma. Many patients cannot afford to buy drugs since their revenues have been considerably reduced. Also, there are tragedies at the checkpoints where women who are delivering are blocked. Several children already died. An ambulance that took five minutes to reach a village needs now 45 minutes".

With its small laboratory, its equipment for echographia, and its two doctors, the Center operates satisfactorily due to of the courage of its staff but the four nurses who must come from neighbouring villages have many difficulties to reach the Center. They need more than one hour. In addition, they must improve their training, which is impossible in such circumstances. Nevertheless, that type of center is the best service a structured social movement may provide to a population that is tempted, in its despair, to adhere to the Hamas. "I am an activist in the social movement" explains Dr. Ahmad Aboushi. We are targeting our activities on the whole population, in favour of all social layers. We have good relations with foreign and European NGOs, in particular with Oxfam. We are fighting for justice, human rights in the medical sphere unfortunately, the Hamas has been progressing here since the second Intifada. Almost 50 % of the population would vote for it whilst it was in the minority before. We must assist family structures and also create a model different from religious fundamentalism. But the Israeli army comes here every night. The city resembles the greatest jail in the world with only one exit point of twelve meters!"

Not far from the health center, there is the social center Al Mubadara which supports social and cultural activities for the population. They try to help people in distress, for example by financing the acquisition of textbooks for university students, by helping women to learn languages. Women themselves decide about their priorities. A discreet autonomy in spite of the veils and long coats... In the streets, children with a sad glance reject the delicacies we are offering them. It is the first time we notice that quiet despair among children who, in Palestine, in spite of the gloomy atmosphere of the refugee camps, usually play with visitors and laugh whenever they receive friendly sweets. Here mistrust and sadness prevail...

A wall separating Palestinians themselves

Later we are welcomed by the **Mayor of Qalqilya, M. Maarouf Zahran**, a well-looking man who speaks quickly, efficiently and to the point. The very model of a contemporary manager we imagine for a Palestine at last free. The picture he gives about the situation of the region is dreadful. On the 15th of April 2002 Israel announced its decision to isolate Palestinians from other Palestinians by erecting a wall

Qalqilya encircled - 7th June 2003



“Here in Qalqilya the wall does not separate the two populations but Palestinians between themselves. There is no border with Israel, merely settlements that encircle the town and a transversal road they wish to ‘make safe’. Israelis invaded the western part of the city and destroyed everything: cafes, restaurants, shops. Impossible to resist that wall : they have tanks and helicopters. This wall is not for security, it helps to steal land and water. To the north, south and west, we have no border with Israel. Moreover that wall has been built close to houses and isolates inhabitants from their fields. They no longer have access to them. What kind of security are they talking about? They promised to build a gate, but nothing makes it possible to cross that wall to reach the fields. The northern gate has been closed since October 2003. The southern gate opens three times a day during 15 minutes, which is insufficient to let women and children go to school, do some shopping, go to the hospital... the side entrance is sometimes closed until 2 or 3 a.m. You never know in advance if you’ll be authorized to enter or exit. Everything depends on the soldiers’ mood. 133 families are thus separated on each side of the wall. 64 teachers are blocked every time; children have lost almost 25 % of their school year; 600 university students are prevented from following their lectures. Due to constant humiliations, the situation is permanently unstable”.

Thus Israelis have built the Road 666 Trans-Israel exactly where the promise had been made to give back the land to Palestinians. Today, this is impossible: the territory is drowned under concrete and asphalt.

Despair is increasing. According to the Mayor, 12 % of the population voted for the Hamas before the wall; now they represent 26 %. Before the wall, 76 % supported moderate political parties. Only 24 % of them make that choice today.

91 patients died at checkpoints; there were 55 deliveries; 25 physicians and health employers have been killed; 425 members of the medical staff injured. More than 3,000 people fled from the city. Divorces increased. 132 families are separated with different identification cards.

“In addition, deploras the Mayor, we are not authorized to use our water. We must buy it from the Israelis. What relation does it have with security? We no longer have access to the 19 artesian wells supplying water to thousands of people. But we exclusively live from agriculture and cattle rearing which represent 53 % of the revenues of our communities. Agricultural lands represent 62 % of the district. They destroyed 105,000 trees, mainly olive trees; 996,000 meters of irrigation channels; 2,100 dunums of agricultural lands. Farmers must have a special permit to

labour their land; children who go through to gates must open their satchels for inspection. Sometimes, they are punished and have to wait 1 or 2 hours before they can go through the gate...”

And if the land is not cultivated, it is confiscated by the Israelis according to an old ottoman law they never fail to invoke. They also clearly stated their intention by defining Qalqilya as a village, what it will become once they will succeed to expel its inhabitants. All this for 23 colonies including 53,000 settlers, stealing water, land and human rights.

A country where trees are illegal

“This is a country where trees are illegal, but not the wall” protests our guide Suhad Shraim at the foot of the wall which projects its eight meters of concrete towards the blue sky. At the top, miradors and immediately the machine-gun and the brutal order “go away, you have no right to stand near the wall”. We are in a long corridor of devastated land, torn trees, houses and shops razed to build that wall. Tags proclaim the rebellion. But we are not authorized to come nearer. The machine-gun becomes threatening . We cross what remains of the field to reach a house located at some 70 meters. This is a pitiful garage with no more clients. A primary school stands there, with its windows open on the grayish colour of the concrete. Of one house, there are only concrete pillars : interdiction to finish it because it cannot overlook the wall. Interdiction to live in it : it has become a sort of stable, above ground ! Interdiction to live, to dream, to stroll by : soldiers with nothing else to do might shoot any time at movable targets. We are told the story of that man who was drinking his coffee, one morning, on his doorsteps. A shot. His wife finds him dead in a pool of blood. How can we qualify this if not by saying that it is a concentration camp, a terror regime.

This is obviously a violation of the fourth Geneva Convention (that prohibits destructions and expropriations in a occupied territory), therefore a war crime. Nevertheless, the world remains silent.

Revolt is vibrating in the voice of the Mayor of Jayyous, a charming village overlooking Qalqilya with a magnificent view on the wall and Road 666. This could be a paradise with olive trees and sheeps grazing peacefully, a wealthy land with ample water. This bucolic piece of land became hell for its inhabitants. Fayez Hassan Mohammad Salim explains how farmers were isolated from their fields, and families separated. University students are prevented from going to their lectures and unemployment constantly increases..



Inexorably. "We, who had plenty of water, we receive it today from a neighbouring village, but this is not sufficient, in particular in summer, and we have only get it during 2 hours every 3 days. We need 25 liters per day and per person. We have no drinking water but they, the Israelis, have swimming-pools! This wall is not located on the borders of 1967 but 4 km inside the occupied territories and at a distance of 6 km from the village. Thus,; they also want to steal our land and pushes to leave the place. Electricity is cut everyday, sometimes during a whole week. The checkpoint opens three times a day, but at variable hours : 6:30, 8:30; it changes. You need 4h to reach a plot that is just in front of you, only a few minutes from the village. Our agricultural

output was equal to 9 million kilos per year. Now, we hardly reach 25 % of that quantity". And the Mayor shows us a simple manuscript sheet without seal or stamp : an Israeli order to destroy 600 dunums of agricultural land. It is because of similar instructions that a farmer lost all his land and was therefore condemned to starve.

"They attack the village every night. They use gas. Children have asthma and other respiratory diseases, in addition to the stress due to anxiety. What will become of this new generation, frustrated and without employment? What difference is there between our situation and that of a refugee camp? Our only hope is The Hague tribunal : let them condemn the wall! It's a shame not to protest against that. We shall continue to fight for our democracy, without forgetting our humanity. But they violate all human rights". A hydrogeologist explained how his own children react towards that permanent violence and humiliation while he is trying to teach them human values.

II. Naplouse: a kite speaks about hope

A beautiful weather, an undulating and quite green landscape. We are at the beginning of spring and the city of Naplouse looks extremely pretty. But the waiting is long at the checkpoint of Houwara. Waiting-time is relative : only one hour for us while peasants and labourers who want to go back to town after their workday must wait sometimes four or five hours packed along the road under the sun or rain. All of them are young men. Although their documents are in order, they need a "Certificate proving that they are not terrorists" delivered by the Israeli Military Authority occupying that Palestinian territory. An additional humiliation that we can only describe, just like that old Israeli woman, a Jew, who reports what she sees everyday at the checkpoint in order to alert human rights associations. She tells us about brutalities, humiliations, sick people who must wait; the rough searching of ambulances. She testifies about the setting recently staged by the army which exhibited before the cameras and medias of the entire world a simple-minded child carrying a belt of explosives. "This was a staging made by the army – she said – there has never been a journalist here or a TV camera. And suddenly, on that day, they were here to arrest that boy..." A pitiful disinformation that deceived nobody.



Checkpoint at Houwara - Naplouse

[...] All of them are young men. Their document are in order but they need a 'Certificate proving that they are not terrorists' delivered by the Israeli Military Authority occupying that Palestinian territory. An additional humiliation [...]

The group of some thirty men is still waiting. We are authorized to get through after a feigned control of our travel permit. The visit is done at full speed since we've lost time at the checkpoint. But it is sufficient to show the courage of a population who still believes in its future. We start with the visit of the University of Naplouse under the guidance of **Saed Jamal Abu-Hijleh**, a translator and Public Relations Officer and we see in particular the radio station located on the campus. Voice of An Najah (the success www.najah.edu/fm) operates since 10 months with seven employees and broadcasts to the whole West Bank local programs in Arabic, French and English. Broadcasting time amounts to some 18 hours. There are political, social, language, scientific, cultural, literature, law or musical programs. It also works with the Department of Journalism of the University and volunteer students. Recently, one of the best students was killed while he reported on a clash with the Israeli army in the refugee camp of Balata, located in the town. The student lived there. He was shot in the stomach while he was phoning his informations to the station, by one of those explosive bullets prohibited by international conventions.

The testimonies about atrocities continue during our visit : kindergarten hit by a missile in the old town. District razed by tanks and bulldozers with a family buried under the debris. Handicapped

searched by a soldier, ordered to leave and shot in the back. His grand-father, who tried to save him, was also shot down. For nothing. For the pleasure of soldiers killers who deambulate in the town and shoot whenever they are bored. Everyday they make an incursion in the refugee camp and start shooting. Narrations are multiplying during our visit to the graveyard of Naplouse : under the beautiful trees sleep at last in peace the "martyrs", those poor victims of the occupant's brutality, in most cases shot down without reason while they were without any weapon. Others have been shot carrying weapons because life is also honour and a means to protect human rights against barbarism. And they pretend that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle-east ! exclaims our guide.

Under the ruins of the historical houses of old Naplouse children play with kites. Just like a message of hope in the middle of desolation since the city, previously prosperous, is experiencing a terrible economic situation because of its suffocation by the Israeli army. The old part of the city has been heavily destroyed by bombings. In addition, a part of the historical heritage of Palestine has disappeared.

When we leave the checkpoint, at nightfall, the young men were still waiting for the goodwill of the occupant. As soon as we had left the place, Saed called to warn us (and we hear it on the mobile phone) that shots were being heard in Balata, like everyday...

III. Gaza : an open-air jail

Erez, the biggest checkpoint in Palestine. A wide barbed-wire entrance strictly organized : no vehicle, unless diplomatic, enters or leaves Gaza. Everybody must cross on foot, through careful controls more or less amicable depending on the quality of the visitors. As far as they are concerned, Palestinians are treated like cattle going through narrow latticed corridors. "Just like in slaughter-houses" – they whisper in our group. Young soldiers (men and women) heavily armed, sometimes rather handsome but with harsh glances, are watching us. They make us wait almost two hours, although all our papers are in order, simply because Daniel Van Hove, who guided several civilian observation missions, is among us and that probably their strategy is to discourage such missions.

Finally we get through with the assistance of the Consulate. We are escorted by two young women-soldiers, in the direction of the second checkpoint, the entrance of a wide corridor topped by a corrugated sheet roof. It is there that Palestinians must wait, sometimes during the whole night before being allowed to get through, subject to the discretion of soldiers, without water or toilets (those we see are destroyed). **Marianne Blume**, a Belgian co-operant in Gaza, describes the humiliations and daily sufferings of the thousands Palestinians who have to bear with that situation in order to look for jobs, drugs, join their family, study. Even in the middle of the winter, men are obliged to only wear short-sleeved shirts to show that they are not carrying weapons or booty-trapped parcels.

This population is confined on the 350 sq.km of Gaza, stuck between Israel, the Egyptian border (guarded by Israel) and the sea. A people of 1.4 million inhabitants including 600,000 refugees is imprisoned since 56 years between the sea, the settlements and a checkpoint heavily militarized.

After passing through the Palestinian security we reach the ghetto of Gaza. Marianne Blume comments the landscape: "we are in Beit Anoun; the orange trees have been razed and roads, destroyed. Palestinians replanted trees, rebuilt the road as quickly as possible. Their way to fight against occupation is to rebuild. There you have a factory for the production of bricks, cement and parpens : all the equipment has been crushed including computers. This region was extremely fertile at the beginning of the 20th century : it exported wheat. Since the occupation there only remain orange-trees, lemon-trees, strawberries plants and various citrus fruits. But strawberries, which are very good, are entirely Palestinian and sold under the Israeli trademark Carmel. Olive-trees have been uprooted by the army. Now we are in the camp of Jabalya, where the first Intifada started. There are about 150,000 people. The habitat is dense; cut by orchards : the fields have been squatted by the inhabitants because of the population explosion. This is a semi-industrial district. They manufacture motor vehicle parts, do canework. Here you have scrap merchants...very suspect they are, because Israelis suspect them of manufacturing handicraft bombs. There, they produce Seven Up with water, bottles and items coming from Israel and embottled here since the water of Gaza is deemed improper for that kind of beverage! It remains that Palestinians are still very much attached to Israeli trademarks, because they believe they are better... Here you have an old district called "the staircase" that was destroyed and entirely rebuilt. The new town has the shape of a grid with its "avenue des Champs Elysées" perpendicular to the sea. The population counts 75 % of refugees. There is a difference between Palestinians born in Gaza and refugees. The latest want to have a de facto recognition of their refugee status and wish at least to visit their village of origin. This has always been denied to them"

We welcome on the bus **Amjad Shawwa**, in charge of the **PNGO in Gaza** (Palestinian non-governmental organization network) and journalists and cameramen among whom **Hassan F.**

Balawi, from the Société Radio et Télévision de Palestine, responsible for the francophone program and euro-mediterranean relations; a representative of Médecins du Monde and a teacher.

No visit of an international delegation since one year

Amjad describes the travel to Khan Younis and Rafah. You cannot see the difference between the town and the refugee camps because they are so close. This place has not received the visit of an international delegation since one year! One year ago, you had to sign a paper of discharge to Israel before going to Gaza. This was rejected by international association for being contrary to the Geneva Convention. At present, there is a new co-ordination procedure between the Foreign Affairs and the army who accept or not the let visitors go through. Only diplomats may cross with a car.”



We pass nearby Arafat’s HQ, which was bombed. “42% of the territory of Gaza are totally under Israeli control due to the presence of settlements of 7,200 Jews protected by 8,000 soldiers - explains Amjad. They have an easy life : land and water free-of-charge, guaranteed security and cheap labour (Chinese, Turks...). Palestinians from 16 to 35 years cannot leave the territory. Thousands of students and sick people cannot study or be properly treated.

We are daily under the attacks of the occupant. It is impossible to develop any activity. Tourist resorts are desperately empty. Fish is very expensive : the occupant allows us to fish only on a limited part of or shores and at a very short distance, where there are less fishes”.

It is here that little Mohamad Al-Dura was shot in front of a colony cut but the main road to Gaza - explains Amjad. “This is the harbour of Gaza, of which nothing remains. Everything has been destroyed. It was built with money from Europe! Your money “ interjects Amjad. Before, it was reputed as a leisure resort, along the sea... A Palestinian power station : it hardly works because Israelis refuse to supply it with oil. “They compel us to buy the energy they produce”. Elsewhere, because of a settlement of 50 households, Palestinians cannot use the main road and must travel along the beach, walking by a heap of refuse generated by the settlers... “we are obliged to take a by-pass road since the few settlers who live there and who generally come only during the week-end to benefit from the sea, block the main road”.

A house has been transformed into a military mirador. A gloomy sight on a huge space where palm-trees and orchards have been razed. Houses are riddled with bullets. Near the dam, a space for the inspection of motor cars. Then, we drive towards Khan Younis and Rafah.

“Israel wishes to control the airspace, the land and the sea to prevent any economic development in Gaza - explains Amjad. 51 % of our population is under 18. More than 45 % of children are traumatized by the occupation. They need psychological treatment. They themselves become increasingly violent. After the assassination of Yasmine, they went to the Hamas while before they supported the Fatah”.

We drive along the airport, also bombed like the Palestinian Security building and the police station of Rafah. Heaps of rubble testify about the systematic destruction of the symbols of the Palestinian Authority, later accused of failing to contain “terrorism”

A worse treatment than animals in the United States!

Saïd Zouarab is the Mayor of Rafah, that jail inside a wider prison. He describes the miserable life of his fellow citizens, “treated worse than animals in the United States”. Human rights are blocked in Erez - he says. Nevertheless, what we want is peace, but with equal rights with Israel, as partners. We see airplanes, tanks, bombs, children killed: what is the security for Israel? It is also ours, we live in the same region. However, we live like slaves. Their security is to destroy us. Here, we are in an agricultural area, the poorest of Gaza with 75 % refugees. Our only revenue is the money our labourers bring back whenever they are authorized to go to Israel. It means as little as 7 to 8 % of the people. Here 2,018 houses have been razed for security reasons, along the border. Not the border of Israel, no, that of Egypt! What is the security issue? Everyday they kill somebody. They killed our whole civilian society. Since 40 years nobody is authorized to go to the sea because of a colony of 40 people. 1,400 people are blocked because of them. Israel pushes us to do mad things and, in spite of that we are opposed to killings, wherever they occur. Seven years ago, they were supposed to leave. Since then they have occupied even more ground. One individual violates the law and the whole Palestine is put in jail. Only 230 houses have been rebuilt in two years. People live with their parents or rent, or stay under tents. Since 5 or 6 years, fishing is restricted according to the goodwill of the military. Military patrol boats are constantly watching”.

**Rafah (South of the Gaza Strip)
2,018 houses destroyed by the Israeli army**



And the Mayor leads us to the very place of Israeli extortions : at the bottom of the main street, a mirador : “They shoot all the time, you cannot go further...” Far away, the Egyptian flag is floating, on the other side of a border stolen by the occupant.

We reach Block O. All the houses have been destroyed on 300 m. According to the Israelis there were tunnels going under the Egyptian border and used to transport weapons. People are living in what remains of their houses, under tarpaulins.

Children play in the rubbish, barefoot. Poverty is unbelievable : “we bring water tanks every three days but they are not compatible with international purity standards. Yesterday 13 houses have been destroyed, with 24 injured and 1 dead”. There is another military tower and on the other side, facades riddled with bullets. Further, the road to the sea is blocked by a colony. All around, façades are riddled with bullets. Dwellers are obliged to brick up their windows and to protect themselves with sandbags. Recently, a woman has died in her kitchen, cowardly shot down. Refuse are spread above the rubbish. No service for the collection of garbage is able to function.

The sight is disheartening. Here you have a soft water equipment that has already be destroyed twice. A multi-storey house, meant to host refugees, is also the permanent target of soldiers. Impossible to live there. “This was built with your money! Thank you for you money! says the Mayor, ironically.

Children playing in the dunes, under a mirador, may be killed any time. Facing that tower, a SOS village for orphans. A bit further, pretty little houses painted in pink are waiting for the arrival of some of the 1,500 refugees. A primary school and children grounds supplement these equipments paid by the UNRWA. Besides, there is a new hospital with 200 beds. It exists since two years but has never been inaugurated due to the total absence of equipments, forgotten by the generous donor. A good project for Belgium - they suggest in our delegation.

It is besides a plantation of pink and red carnations and in front of lemon trees heavy with fruits that ends our visit to Rafah, jail inside a greater prison, with its Mayor still desperate in spite of the moral support given by our too quick visit.

The hell of Mawasi

“We are hopeless, jobless, homeless, concludes Amjad while continuing the visit. He stresses that children and schools are the target of the occupant. “Do you know that it is prohibited to distribute textbooks devoted to the history of Palestine?”



Destructions near the wall surrounding the colonies of Goush Katif

The worse was still to be seen in the Gaza Strip : “the area of Tufah, a refugee camp of Khan Younis and the prohibited zone of Mawasi, called that way because it contains “gold”, that is a groundwater of excellent quality (Mawasi means “the best water”). Of course, a colony settled there (Goush Katif) along the sea. This place that should in principle look romantic is presently closed by concrete walls and impressive barbed-wire.

Mawasi is a dungeon in the prison of Gaza. The description that follows was made by privileged witnesses including a member of Médecins du Monde (see their report of November 2003 on www.medecinsdumonde.org) who accompanied our mission to Gaza. “There are between 8,000 and 9,000 Palestinians in that inferno. Fishing farmers cannot get in or out as they wish. Fishing is prohibited beyond a ridiculous coastal strip. Fishers cannot repair their boats; they have electricity only 5 hours a day, otherwise it’s the curfew. They are not entitled to have a generator or to be connected to the Israeli energy network; they are compelled to watch television with truck batteries... It is extremely difficult to receive medical care. Ambulances are blocked at the crossing during two or three hours irrespective of the seriousness of the patient’s condition.

There are two out-patient units, two physicians, two male nurses and two chemists. Serious cases must be referred to Khan Younis. Patients cannot bring medications themselves, everything goes through the International Red Cross. Only women and elderly people are authorized to cross the gate. Men cannot go out. Everything is being done to psychologically destroy these people. Every Israeli soldier has a right of life and death over them. They shoot who they want and lie whenever there are protests. Sometimes they shoot a burst of machine-gun when they are bored...”

Narrators add that they did not invent anything : the press has published the account of a sniper who boasted to kill children. In fact, Médecins du Monde noticed that since several days they received children killed with a bullet in the head. Only one bullet. Then, during a few days, children killed by a bullet straight in the chest. This means that children had not been hit anywhere on the body, but methodically. The sniper’s confession reveals that this corresponds to strict instructions from the military hierarchy. Crack regiments are spread over the various occupied areas ; they use sighting guns that kill with precision at a distance of 300 m. They choose a child who seems to be a leader or more boisterous and shoot him down, calmly !! This policy based on terror is applied with total cynicism and the Israeli population is informed since the medias relate such events.

After this abominable testimony, the humiliating wait hours spent at the Erez checkpoint seems ridiculous, expect that the young people, heavily armed, who were blocking us in the cage-corridor looked under the influence of narcotics.

Further on, in the VIP zone reserved to foreigners, we are still waiting and talking with two young soldiers obviously disgusted by their job. But to refuse to serve in the army or protest is like professional death penalty in Israel, where they could be considered as traitors by everybody. You are a traitor if you want to respect the most basic human rights.

IV. But what does Europe?



Our mission had the opportunity to meet various major witnesses in Palestine, starting with **the President of the Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat** on the day following the statement of support of the American President Bush to the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and to his plan of partial withdrawal from Gaza, keeping of the settlements elsewhere; refusal of the return of Palestinian refugees to their lands confiscated by Israel.

In the Mouquata, heavily destroyed, in Ramallah, Yasser Arafat seemed stunned by that statement particularly disastrous for his people. “It is a disaster - he said. The principles of the Madrid Conference (land against peace) supported by Bush-father have been cancelled by his son. There is no mention of the United Nations resolutions, Jerusalem as a capital, Palestinians as partners. There only remain Sharon and his crimes. Settlements will be the new borders of Israel. Hence, 57 % of the occupied territories are being confiscated including Jerusalem. Today, they completely Judaize Jerusalem to the detriment of Christians and Muslims who are prevented from going to the Mosque of Al Aqsa, even on Friday. All our agreements, even those signed at the white House, have been cancelled yesterday. At present, Israelis have the protection of the Americans to continue their crimes against the Palestinian people, against Palestinians infrastructures. The wall cuts the historical routes between Bethleem and the sacred heart of Jerusalem. Patriarch use to travel along them... they say they will leave Gaza, but they continue to control the air space, the land in the direction of Egypt and even the sea. What remains for us?

The President offers us a copy of an eloquent painting : the Caravan of the Magi following the Christmas star... blocked by the wall.

From our side, we talk about the intensity of the repression against the Palestinians, the report of American and European experts according to which Israelis are using uranium in their ammunitions against Palestinians. “We accepted to make peace by accepting to live in 22 % of our historical territory. Today, they take 57 % of that. We are experiencing cruel circumstances. This means that there will no peace now in the Middle-East. Yesterday a last bullet has been fired against peace. One must bring pressure on Europe since only Europe will be able to save peace”.

The civil society movement: master trump

Europe was in the center of our discussion during our meeting with the **vice-assistant Minister for External Relations Ilan Halevi and Mrs Samia Bamieh, Director of the Departement of relations with Europe.**

Ilan Halevi stresses the fact that Bush’s statement cancels all the basis of a negotiated peace. It guarantees the unilateral and unnegotiated annexion of Palestinian lands. Thus, Bush gives his blessing to the accomplished fact of colonization and dismantles any legal and political framework that would enable to go forward in a negotiated way. The people, as far as he is

concerned, reacts essentially in a non violent fashion, through a daily and multifaceted resistance: one must continue to live. A struggle to which also adhere Israeli and foreign pacifists in their opposition to the wall, provoking a very strong retaliation from the Israelis. Europe is the only actor able to do something to counter-balance that setback. Arabs countries are powerless and they have demonstrated this recently in Tunis. The other major blocks have no influence whatsoever on that situation.

For Samia Bamieh, what is needed is an international intervention. We cannot accept that Europe handles the leadership over the world to the United States. In order that Europe will move, the civil society movement is of great importance. It is our master trump.

The parliamentarian delegation recalls that the European Commissioner Patten has always been legalistic concerning Palestine and that there are presently parliamentarian groups for Palestine in each national Parliament, implying a new mobilization process of citizens and MPs, through the redefinition of the legal frame in which one must make progress.

In this frame, underlines, Ilan Halevi, the Belgian position is the most positive for Palestine. But since one year, we note a progressive recoil of the European position under the pressure of Israel and the United States. Besides it has never been officially associated to the negotiations with these two countries in spite of the various gestures made by European diplomats in favour of Israel... Even the withdrawal of the law of universal competence by Belgium was of no use. Just remember the difficulties the special European envoy, the Belgian Marc Otte, encountered here. Concerning Spain, we wonder if the change of government will alter the policy led by those Spaniards who possibly do not want a confrontation with the Americans.

Two States? Europe must lay down its conditions

Met at the Belgian Consulate in Jerusalem and invited by the **Consul M. Guido Courtois, the special European envoy Marc Otte** outlined the following analysis : already in December, Sharon announced to the United States the absence of the Palestinian partner and his unilateral measures. Israeli occupation has become even more oppressive with the erection of the wall and Palestinian despair is deeper. This materializes Sharon's old dream : Palestinian cantons in the occupied territories together with Palestinian "self-governments" without State. He opposes reservations that make impossible the "Road Map" and the army is deploying on the most defendable lines. This is the "parking" alternative awaiting a Palestinian leader without terrorism, endlessly postponing the advent of negotiations. Ten years? The time necessary to build the "Security fence". As far as the idea of leaving Gaza is concerned, it serves well Sharon, since the majority of Israelis do no longer want Gaza, which is very expensive for them : 7,200 settlers mobilize the resources of 30,000 soldiers. On the other hand they criticize Sharon for having failed to generate security as well as for the corruption scandals. Withdrawing from Gaza and suppressing a few colonies will no change at all Sharon's plan. In parallel, Bush needs international success and supports the idea of two juxtaposed States, with a new leadership in Palestine. Europe, the Arabs States and Palestine have the opportunity to change something with the "Road Map" and to set the conditions leading to the creation of two states. The purpose is also to establish a link between Gaza and the West Bank and to lay down conditions to Israel for the reconstruction of Gaza. Sharon wants that the big settlements that are backed on the Israeli territories be integrated with Israel (plus Hebron, Kyriat Arbat, Jerusalem-east). He wants the assurance that the right of return of refugees be only implemented in the Palestinian territory and not in Israel where Bush agrees to maintain the Jewish characteristics of that State. This plan is not incompatible with Bush's vision of two States. On their side, Palestinians want an adjustment of their borders in the frame of agreements on the exchange of territories and the

right of return while preserving the Jewish character of Israel, however with compensations for those Palestinians who do not wish to come back (cf. Arabs Summit in Beirut). One must also note the propositions made by Egypt to securize the border between Gaza and Egypt by training the Palestinian forces of Gaza and encouraging a truce with Gaza islamists.

The enthusiasm was rather great in Gaza, continues Marc Otte, with the perspective of recovering agricultural lands, a harbour and an airport. But the United States must clarify the situation and Europe must reaffirm its conditions which are a springboard for the acceleration of the implementation of the Roadmap and its conclusion in 2005. However, not much has been accomplished; security is not guaranteed by the Palestinians and the Israelis have continued their colonization. The wall has created enclaves where Palestinians are locked, generating an infernal situation for some of them. The wall will encourage the departure of Palestinians (a sort of ethnic cleansing) and Jordan fears a new influx of refugees. There are already tens of thousands. In addition, there is a considerable feeling of unrest in the Arabs world following the situation in Iraq and the ideas to democratize the region, according to the US Plan of a Greater Middle East. This is perceived as a diktat imposed from the outside which does favour neither political stability or the feeling of the Arabs world to control its destiny. We've seen the consequences during the failure of the Arabs Summit in Tunis.

Europe demonstrated that Barcelona* could open real political perspectives. It spends 3 billion euro every year in the Mediterranean area, but each violation of the "Road Map" makes peace even more distant. Without a central solution, nothing will be obtained. Just like in Iraq. Palestinians have made considerable efforts to implement the requested reforms. On the Israeli side, society has changed due to violence. The population lost hope as far as peace is concerned. 86 % of the Israelis are in favour of the wall because it materializes the physical separation between these two peoples who no longer wish to see each other. Moreover, Israel has experienced the inflow of one million Jews coming from the former USSR. One million Israeli citizens are also Europeans. Therefore - says Marc Otte - we must accept that some conflicts have no short-term solution, except a radical intervention, although we've seen in the Balkans that such a measure was not a success.

**Meeting "Free Marwan Barghouti"
Ramallah 15th April 2004**



We must start again with the civilian society, with personalities belonging to another generation like Nusseibeh, Marwan Barghouti (still imprisoned in Israel). Concerning the stake represented by water, Marc Otte recalls that Israel pledged to deliver basic services to the Palestinians : water, fuel and energy...

It is obvious that the shrewd diplomatic arguments elaborated by Marc Otte are diametrically opposed to the horrors observed on the spot and that they will never convince Palestinians who believe that they have already made all the acceptable concessions and consider that they are, more than ever, colonized, repressed, transformed into "Bantustans" by the unrelenting policy of apartheid implemented by the successive governments of Israel.

* The Barcelona agreements were signed in November 1995. They foresee to transform the Mediterranean area into a wide free trade zone based on the respect of fundamental rights e.g. human rights, promotion of democracy, etc..

The paranoia of “securitism”

We met **Albert Aghazarian, lecturer at the Bir Zeit University**, an intellectual recognized for his deep historical knowledge of Jerusalem, his frankness and his wide erudition. In his eyes, the paranoia of “securitism” has spread in Israel : it has become the global end as well as the solution. This policy line has been developed by the intelligence services which have no other vision of the world than war against terror . The real question is to know when war against terror will end. The answer is : never of course. There are different wars : for water, Iraq, Afghanistan, Al Qaïda, Saddam Hussein, Syria, Hamas... These wars are not interrelated but they are linked with the security assignments of the intelligence departments. Security policy is the equivalent of Imperialism and is defined by the Chiefs-of-staff. In Israel, there are many peace movements, even if they are a minority, but they are viewed as cowards. I believe that the peace movement must go to the street with a soldier’s spirit. It cannot limit itself to romantic considerations. It must lift all ambiguities. This Israeli regime has done more harm than ever before to the Jewish people. I have no hatred, I just pity them. A policy based on apartheid and security cannot succeed: it has always come to nothing. Wherever there is an Israeli, anxiety is always present. He needs to create an enemy, inside or outside, since only security ensures the cohesion in that country composed of Russians, Falachas, Askhenazes, Sepharades...”

At the end, a cry of hope : “the world will awaken one day, according to the simple principle of life, the victory of life over death, of the wise man against the sword. Jerusalem is the city where the light emerges and I maintain that tradition”

We must act

After returning from the Palestinian Territories the mission noted the urgency of the situation and asks for concrete and efficient measures at the following levels :

1. Give back to Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, the attributes of his power and to the Palestinian Authority all the prerogatives that belonged to it after Oslo, otherwise it will be impossible to reach a negotiated peace for the security of both Israelis and Palestinians.
2. Take Gaza out of its status of ghetto. Gaza Strip inhabitants are locked in. This confinement leads them to a serious economic disaster and a social explosion without precedent. This report poses a major question : does the Israeli government intend to provoke that social explosion in order to repress it in a bloodbath?
3. Replace the wall by an interposition force on the Greenline. Our report shows that the wall is a catastrophe. Israeli authorities must stop its construction and dismantle the segments already built.
4. Insist on the freedom of movement for :
 - the Palestinian populations who are prevented to study, work, trade, enjoy medical care, have supplies, etc...
 - humanitarian organizations that bring an urgent and essential material assistance to the Palestinian populations
 - missions of international observers who regularly visit the occupied Territories.

The European Union must take urgent actions by participating in a program designed to securize the population so that they will be able to relaunch peace negotiation. The only way for Europe to play its role of trustworthy actor is to require the application of the rules of international law e.g. the end of the occupation, dismantling of settlements, respect of the United Nations resolutions and of the fourth Geneva Convention by Israel as an occupant power; finally to insist on the controlled implementation of the Road Map with a view to the recognition of the Palestinian State.

The European Union must use all the means at its disposal including the suspension of the association agreements between the E.U. and Israel as long as Israel systematically and openly violates Art. 2 of the said agreements (“relations between Parties as well as all the provisions of the present Agreement are based on the respect of human rights and the principles of democracy”).

Belgium must promote vis-à-vis its European colleagues and at the level of the United Nations a mechanism designed to foster peace negotiations and similar to that used by the European Union in the 1980 s. to fight against Apartheid in South Africa, a mechanism composed of “positive” and “negative” measures.

Among those “positive” measures, Belgium should participate in the mobilization of important means for the building of peace and coexistence in order to enable the return and re-integration of settlers in Israel, the return and re-integration of an equivalent number of refugees in Palestine,

the reconstruction and building of infrastructures for the well-being of the population; support to local and community initiatives and trade-unions capables of strenghtening the internal and external co-existence between Israelis and Palestinians.

The means shall be deployed each time Israel and/or the Palestinian Authority are active in the implementation of the Road Map and for the respect of the resolutions, conventions and international agreements relating to the settlement of the conflict and the recognition of a Palestinian State.

Among “negative” measures, Belgium, inside the European Union, must be involved more activity in a process of partial or total suspension of the agreements concluded with Israel in the field of cultural, scientific, technical and economic co-operation in order to exert on the Hebrew government all the necessary pressures that will lead it to revise it policy of war, colonization and confinement of the Palestinians.

Let us finally recall that there will be no sustainable solution to the conflict as long as the Powers and parties to the conflict will not accept to revert to multilateralism and reject the central role of the United Nations in the settlement of the conflict.

In other words, some action lines have been proposed during our conversation **with M. Gino Nale, commercial and economic attaché at the Belgian Embassy in Tel-Aviv and M. Dani Ceuninck, representative of the DGDC in Jerusalem**, whose actions are highly appreciated by Vice-Minister Ilan Halevi and his assistant.

Concerning the commercial aspect, M. Nale notes that there is no longer any exportation from Belgium to the occupied territories. Businessmen are afraid of the situation although opportunities should exist in the following sectors : food, building, basic medical equipment. In that perspective “Catalogue Days” are organized : three days visits for businessmen invited by the Chamber of Commerce in Ramallah, Hebron, Bethleem and Jerusalem-East. A first contact could take place in 2005. It must be noted than, since three years, there has been no visit of M. Nale to Palestine.

Another action line proposed by the delegation a Belgique Members of Parliament would be to contribute to the UNWRA programs. One should so relaunch the co-operation agreement with Palestine and support some interesting sectors : for instance, in the field of tourism, give scholarstrips in order to train students at the CERIA. In the frame of the de-federalization of Co-operation to Development other opportunities might be followed e.g. in agriculture, water treatment, etc. M. Nale is asked to prepare a small note for that purpose. Also, there is a housing plan made by the Flemish Region for Palestine: it grants advances on subsidies for various projects. Identical propositions could be made to the Walloon Region.

Dani Ceuninck arrived too recently in Palestine, but the main results of his preliminary contacts revolve around education and primary health care, since these essential policies are seriously threatened by the sealing off of the territories and the confinement of their population.

One may add to these considerations the assistance to be given to the rather stable and well organized institutions composing the Palestinian society, in spite of the economic and social tragedy experienced by the population : PNGO, UPMRC and others.

Annexes

Press Release (18.04.04) : Elio Di Rupo expose the unworthy proceedings of the Head of Government of a democratic State

Elio Di Rupo, President of the Socialist Party, resolutely condemns the assassination by the Israeli Army of a Palestinian leader, Abdelaziz el-Rantissi. This type of execution which, in addition to the individuals targeted very often provokes the death of civilians including children, violates the most elementary rules of law. These hooligan methods are unworthy of a democratic State.

Elio Di Rupo can only note the correlation that exists between the revival of violence in the Middle-east and the Statements made last week by President A.W. Bush during his meetings with Ariel Sharon and, later, Tony Blair.

By miserably abdicating to the Israeli claims concerning the borders of 1967 and the right of return of Palestinian refugees, President Bush has probably annihilated the efforts in the direction of peace initiated inter alia by his predecessors, as well as the fruits of many years of negotiation.

It is illusory to believe that the security and well-being of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples may sustainably depend on a sort of American-Israeli Peace for the Middle-east, unilaterally imposed, as foreseen in the Sharon Plan. It is an intellectual and political fraud!

Today, Bush and Sharon are setting ablaze the whole world and running the risk of unprecedented revival of international terrorism. The permanent humiliation in which they put millions of human beings is a time-bomb for the whole planet!

Elio Di Rupo considers that both Israeli and Palestinians have the right to live in peace within safe and recognized borders. They must also recover the way to prosperity.

According to him, a fair and sustainable peace is only thinkable in the Middle-East provided that it results from negotiations and the consent of the peoples directly concerned :Palestinians and Israelis.

Finally, Elio Di Rupo hopes that the results of the European elections will give the European Union a progressive majority that shall act for peace in the Middle-East. He also hopes that there will be a change in the United States Government, next November. These two events could at least create the conditions of a return to a dynamic of peace and stability in the world.

« Words have failed us» by Amira Hass

March 4, 2004 in Ha'aretz

Amira Hass is an award-winning Israeli journalist who lives in Ramallah in the West Bank..

This is an admission of failure. The written word is a failure at making tangible to Israeli readers the true horror of the occupation in the Gaza Strip. When something is written about the sea being closed off to Palestinians in the north and south of the Strip, the response will be "they are terrorists." If something is written about neighborhoods in the western part of the Khan Yunis refugee camp and how the buildings are all full of bullet holes from heavy machine guns and cannon shells, the response will be "the Palestinians started it." Tell the story of how 15-year-old Yusuf Bashir's family home in Dir al-Balah has been turned into an army fortress, and in Israel they'll say, "there is no choice, the Jewish settlement of Kfar Darom must be protected, like Kfar Dekalim, Atzmona and Morag."

A report that the soldiers in a military position right next to Yusuf's house agreed to allow a UN team into the family's courtyard will be used in Israel as proof of the humanitarian attitudes of soldiers who are ready to take risks while doing their duties. And when it's reported that suddenly one of the soldiers - an officer, as the IDF spokeswoman would later say - "shot at the wheels of a suspicious vehicle" (the UN team's car), in Israel that will be a shooting that never happened. And then, it will be reported that the boy, Yusuf Bashir, was shot in the back as he waved goodbye to the visitors from the UN, and it is possible he'll remain paralyzed for life - maybe that word "paralyzed" will give a few readers pause. But so many stories about so many Yusufs never get reported, and never will get reported.

This admission of the failure of the written word is not meant to enhance the role of photography. A picture may indeed be worth a thousand words, but for the Israeli occupation to approach some level of comprehension, Israelis need to see tens of thousands of photographs, one after the other, or watch documentaries that are at least eight hours long each, so they could grasp in real time the fear in the eyes of the school children when some whistling above turns into twisted crushed metal with charcoaled bodies inside.

Another movie should show the viewers the vineyards of Sheikh Ajalin, the ripe grapefruits, the peasants who for years nurtured the fruit with great love only to see it all turned to scorched earth left behind by Israeli tanks and bulldozers. No movie has yet been produced that would enable Israelis to taste the wonderful grapes of Sheikh Ajalin. The vineyards are gone so the military positions can protect Netzarim.

How would photographs illustrate the following facts - from September 29th [2000] up to Monday this week, 94 Israelis have been killed - 27 civilians and 67 soldiers, according to the IDF. From that same date up to February 18th this year 1,231 Palestinians have been killed - all of them were terrorists? Lacking a central Palestinian agency, there are differences between the data provided by Palestinian groups and none claim to be 100 percent accurate.

The human rights group Mezan, based in Jabalya refugee camp, found that 81 women were killed by IDF gunfire in the Strip; 344 children under the age of 18 were killed by IDF gunfire; 255 members of the Palestinian security and police forces, killed either at their positions or offices and

frequently in battle; 264 were armed men who took part in battles with the IDF or tried to attack military positions or settlers and settlements. In the IDF's targeted assassinations, 46 of those killed were the targets of the attacks - and 80 were passersby killed with "pinpoint precision."

The failure to bring all this home to readers is not because of the weakness of words or a lack of pictures. It is because Israeli society has learned to live in peace with the following facts. There are 8,000 Jews and 1.4 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The total area of the Strip is 365 square kilometers. The settlements occupy 54 square kilometers. Along with the areas held by the IDF, according to the Oslo accords, 20 percent of the Strip is under Israeli control. That's 20 percent of the territory for half of one percent of the population.

The Israeli army's mission is to protect the security of the Israeli half of one percent, which occupies plenty of land, has freedom of movement, opportunities for development, and fresh water - unlike the saline liquid allocated to the Palestinians. Israeli military positions meant to protect the settlements are located inside and beside the settlements and have a commanding view of all the civilian Palestinian neighborhoods.

The proximity of every expansive settlement to the densely populated, suffocating crowded Palestinian community is what causes the large number of Palestinian casualties in the Gaza Strip, including many civilians. It is what determines the flexible rules of engagement, the type of bombs that break into fragments, the unmanned aircrafts that fire missiles.

The IDF operates within the logic of those arrogant, cynical, and ruthless settlements of a privileged few sitting in the midst of the only land reserves that the Palestinians have in the Gaza Strip. Despite talk of "withdrawal," Israeli society has yet to show any signs that it is shaking off the blatantly immoral logic that feeds the very existence of the settlements. And that's as true of the Gaza Strip as it is of the West Bank.

Advised documents

- **Amnesty international** : www.amnesty.org
- **Médecins du Monde** : www.medecinsdumonde.org
- **Economic, Social and Cultural Right. The Right to food in West Bank and Gaza. Report by the Special Rapporteur Jean Ziegler – United Nations** : www.droitshumains.org/alimentation/pdf/rapp-angl.pdf

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French NGO's for Palestine :
<http://plateforme-palestine.netliberte.org>

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Vigie Média Palestine : www.vigie-media-palestine.org

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B'Tselem : www.btselem.org

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