

August 15, 2006

## **An Update on Palestinian Movement, Access and Trade in the West Bank and Gaza**

By World Bank

The World Bank issued a report on August 15, 2006 that addressed issues related to Palestinian movement, trade, and access in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Excerpts from the Report follow:

### **Internal Movement within the West Bank**

After a considerable reduction in numbers in 2004-5, there are now more than 540 checkpoints and fixed impediments compared to 376 in August 2005. The combined impact of these impediments, coupled with complex permit restrictions, has been a fragmentation of the socio-economic space in the West Bank into a northern, a central and a southern economic zone, bounded on three sides by the separation barrier and to the west by a Jordan Valley that is increasingly difficult for Palestinians to access. As a result of this fracturing process, transportation costs have increased by 6-7 times along some routes. Internal fragmentation also interferes with governance and the maintenance of public order, and disrupts access to education and health care. The Bank estimates that internal closures accounted for approximately half of the decline in real GDP (perhaps some 15 percent) observed between 2000 and 2002. The separation barrier adds a particular set of movement and access difficulties, and has been estimated by the Bank to cost the Palestinian economy some 2-3 percentage points of GDP per annum. . . .

### **Physical Impediments: Fixed Impediments, Flying Checkpoints, Restricted Roads**

Many of the fixed obstacles block access to roads that are partially or wholly restricted to use by Israelis (in particular Israeli military and settlers); OCHA [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs] estimates that some 1,200 kilometers of West Bank roads are partially or wholly restricted in this manner. GOI clarified to the Bank in 2004 that the rationale for internal closure relates not only to the interdiction of terrorists intent on attacking Israel, but also to the protection of settlers and settler access; it follows, therefore, that a return to the pre-intifada status quo is unlikely without an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank settlements, or a sea-change in today's confrontational environment. GOI's proposed solution to restricted Palestinian mobility is to construct an alternative transportation system for Palestinians, and in 2004 donors were asked to finance 52 roads (totaling 500 kilometers) and 16 under/overpasses as a "continuous movement" package. Donors declined to do so, maintaining that Palestinians should be given access to the existing road system. The donor reaction was influenced by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion of July 2004, which warned against providing assistance that would help maintain the settlements (which the ICJ deemed to be illegal under international law).

Roughly 55% of the West Bank is designated as Area C, constraining Palestinian access and exploitation of the land. In December 2004 the Bank recommended that the four evacuated West Bank settlements be redesignated Area A, giving the PA [Palestinian Authority] full security and civilian control. As things stand, they remain as Area C, meaning that

Palestinians are only able to enter them with permits/permission from COGAT [Office for the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories]. The PA has no more civil jurisdiction there than before, and Palestinians are unable to register land or acquire permits to build or initiate businesses there. While the evacuation of Ganim and Kaddim helped free up movement within the Jenin area, travel to Tulkarm in the north and to the central West Bank has become more difficult after the closure of Shave Shomron and Road 585. . . .

### **The Separation Barrier**

Another estimated 61,000 Palestinians who are residents of East Jerusalem will be separated by the barrier from family and community networks, employment opportunities and municipal services. Furthermore, approximately 500,000 Palestinians live within 1 km of the barrier, and many of these people have been affected by a structure that cuts through properties, economic networks, service access routes and neighborhoods. The disruption to their lives is increased by imperfect access through the barrier. Only 27 of 65 gates are regularly accessible to Palestinians, and only to those who have obtained the requisite permits; a further 11 are accessible during certain seasons, and 27 are closed to Palestinians and are used by settlers and other Israelis. Such restrictions mean that Palestinians must routinely travel many kilometers out of their way to conduct the normal business of their lives. The case of Salfit, a commercial hub in the northern West Bank, is illustrative of these difficulties and the negative impact they have on Palestinian economic life. In the past, residents of the villages of Haris, Qira, Jam'in and Deir Istiya could reach Salfit by road in 5-10 minutes. In order to provide safe access for Israelis in and out of the Ariel settlement, the IDF has blocked the road and forbidden Palestinians from using it. To reach Salfit today, the villagers must head east on Route 505 (forbidden to Palestinians unless they have a permit, lack of which exposes them to being sent back or arrested or having their vehicles confiscated.) In general, permits for both persons and vehicles are difficult to obtain. They must then travel south to the entrance of Yasuf village. Here a roadblock obliges them to leave their vehicles, cross on foot, and pick up transport to Salfit. A five minute journey now takes up to an hour under the best of circumstances and requires at least two changes of vehicle and considerably higher costs.

Source: Settlement Report Vol. 16 No. 5