

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

CUPE



THE WALL MUST FALL

End the Occupation and the violence in Israel-Palestine



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Some people call it a "security fence," others call it the "apartheid wall." The International Court of Justice calls it the "wall". It is a 25-foot-high barrier of chain link fence, barbed wire and concrete slabs with 30-100-metre buffer zones that winds its way through the Palestinian West Bank. In June 2005 it was 225 km long, but it will be over 600 km when completed. The Berlin Wall was 155 km long and 10 feet high.

"Despite claims by the state of Israel that the wall is a security barrier to protect Israelis from suicide bombers, it is clear from its location that its purpose is to annex land and water resources to further divide the West Bank and to protect Israeli settlements."

– United Church of Canada

<http://www.united-church.ca/response/mideast/040309.shtm>

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**End the Occupation
and the violence in Israel-Palestine**

An educational booklet produced by
CUPE BC's International Solidarity Committee

June 2005

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Preface

CUPE supports peace in the Middle East

It is with great pleasure that we publish the third edition of *The wall must fall*.

CUPE BC's international solidarity committee produced the booklet after receiving a mandate to do so through resolutions adopted at the CUPE BC convention in 2001 and 2003.

Trade unions deal principally with wages and working conditions, but we also serve as human rights organizations. As such, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) has a long history of debating social justice issues. The publication of educational materials on the Israeli/Palestine conflict follows in that tradition.

The wall must fall is not an official position paper but rather a primer for interested union and community members featuring voices from the Israeli and Palestinian peace movements that are shut out of the mainstream media.

By highlighting the progressive peace movement, *The wall must fall* demonstrates that this issue is not a Jewish vs. Palestinian question but one of basic human rights.

The booklet's main message is that peace requires the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestine territories (West Bank and Gaza), the dismantling of the wall and an end to violence against all Israeli and Palestinian civilians. This view is consistent with international law and reflects the general position of the World Council of Churches, the Presbyterian Church, the United Church, the New Democratic Party and other progressive organizations.

The recent ceasefire between Palestinian groups and the Israeli Army in the area (March 2005), plus Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's commitment to end the occupation in Gaza, have given rise to hopes that peace is on the horizon.

Unfortunately, as noted in the new introduction to the third edition, Israeli and Palestinian peace voices report that the Israeli wall and new Israeli settlements continue to be built on Palestinian land in the West Bank.

We are hopeful for an end to the occupation and a just peace for both Israelis and Palestinians.

I invite readers to comment on this booklet. Copies can be downloaded from our website at www.cupe.bc.ca.

Barry O'Neill
CUPE BC President
June 2005

POPULATION

Israel	5,700,000
Jews	4,500,000
Palestinians	1,200,000
West Bank	2,600,000
Palestinians	2,200,000
Jewish Settlers	400,000
Gaza	1,206,000
Palestinians	1,200,000
Jewish Settlers	6,000

Source: World Facts.

LAND

Historic Palestine (now consisting of Israel, West Bank and Gaza)	26,995 sq km
Israel	20,770 (78%)
Proposed Palestinian State (Occupied Territories)	6,225 (22%)
West Bank	5,860
Gaza	365

CANADIAN COMPARISONS

Prince Edward Island	5,660 sq. km
Vancouver Island	32,136 sq. km



Foreword

Voices of dissent –The ‘other Israel’

By Carl Rosenberg, Editor, Canadian Jewish Outlook

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most bitter conflicts of modern times. It involves two peoples, each with a right to self-determination, and has produced immense suffering on both sides.

However, the overall situation is not symmetrical. The persistence of the conflict is a result of the continuing dispossession and occupation of one nation by the other.

In 1968, soon after the beginning of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the veteran Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery predicted that the occupation would bring about a “steep spiral of terror and counter-terror, killing and retaliation, sabotage and mass deportation.” This would cause “undreamt-of misery to the Palestinian people” while turning Israel into “an armed and beleaguered camp.”

Avnery's fears have been borne out. Israeli state oppression against the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza has taken various forms, many of them described in this booklet. They include such brutal practices as demolition of Palestinian homes, confiscation of land, harassment of Palestinians at Israeli military checkpoints, and “retaliatory” military attacks on Palestinian civilians.

This regime of occupation has been rapidly turning Israel into what the late Argentine-Jewish journalist Jacobo Timerman called “the South Africa of the Middle East.” Added to this, and to a great extent in reaction to it, are the vicious attacks on Israeli civilians by such groups as Hamas, further deepening the misery and loss of hope on both sides.

Far too often, the Israeli state is portrayed by mainstream Jewish organizations as synonymous with Judaism or the Jewish people, so that any forthright criticism of it is characterized as anti-Semitic. This false equation effectively places the Israeli state beyond serious criticism and does no good to the Israeli people themselves, let alone the Palestinians.

However, many Jews, both inside and outside Israel, have challenged this uncritical and defensive view of Israeli reality. Many of them are involved in left-wing and progressive movements. These include groups like the United Jewish People's Order, Jews for a Just Peace in Vancouver and Winnipeg, and prominent intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky and I.F. Stone.

In particular, the Israeli government's systemic oppression of the Palestinians has been condemned by Israeli-Jewish dissidents such as Uri Avnery, former deputy mayor of Jerusalem Meron Benvenisti, and members of the Israeli Knesset (parliament) such as feminist Shulamit Aloni.

Others include various peace and justice movements such as Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc), Bat Shalom (a feminist peace group), the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions, and the Israeli “refuseniks” who refuse to serve in the occupied territories.

Such voices of dissent represent “the other Israel”, the alternative to the Israeli establishment, which in North America is often presented as virtually synonymous with Israel as a whole. These diverse voices show that the conflicting worldviews do not run along “ethnic” lines, between Jews and Arabs, but between value systems. They represent the values of equality of rights for both peoples versus those of unthinking “my-country-right-or-wrong” nationalism.

This CUPE BC booklet is part of a growing educational effort meant to build a solidarity campaign similar to the one created to fight against the apartheid regime in South Africa. It is a campaign that takes a stand against one of the longest post-war military occupations of a civilian population.

It is especially welcome to see this campaign gaining support among the trade union movement, which has so often supported other progressive movements.

Only if there is an end to the Israeli state’s brutal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza can there be a humane future for both Israelis and Palestinians. This can only come about through an international awareness of the situation. This booklet is an important step in that direction.

Introduction

A just peace in 2005/2006?

The death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004 and the election of new Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas in January 2005 have generated much media attention regarding the peace process in Israel/Palestine.

In February 2005, the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority negotiated a ceasefire, which has put an end to some of the violence against Israeli and Palestinian citizens. The parties have been discussing the possibility of peace negotiations. Israel unilaterally announced plans to evacuate 8,000 Jewish settlers from the Gaza strip. This is what Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon refers to as the “Gaza disengagement.”

So does all this news herald the coming of peace in Israel/Palestine in 2005/2006? Unfortunately not, say Gush Shalom (the Israeli Peace group) and the World Council of Churches.

In an open letter of March 30, 2005, Peter Weiderud of the World Council of Churches notes that while the world’s attention is drawn to Israeli’s Gaza withdrawal plans:

- The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza continues. In fact, the withdrawal of Israeli settlers from Gaza won’t end the occupation because Gaza is surrounded by an electronic fence, which will continue to imprison its inhabitants and all entries and exits by land, air and sea to Gaza are controlled by the Israelis.

- Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are still subjected to checkpoints, curfews, closures and up to 70 per cent unemployment, among other imposed hardships.
- The Israeli government continues to build the massive separation wall in the West Bank seizing more Palestinian farm land and violently disrupting all peaceful protests by Palestinian villagers organized into the National Committee to Resist Apartheid Wall (April 2005/Palestine).
- Jewish-only settlements are expanding in the Palestinian West Bank. In March 2005, 3,500 new units were announced in Maale Adumim, which has effectively cut the West Bank in half. This decision mocks prospects for a viable Palestinian state with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

All of this illegal Israeli activity goes virtually unreported in the Canadian media.

Is peace possible while the wall stands?

Peace groups, such as Gush Shalom and the World Council of Churches, have always said that it is impossible to have peace while the wall and Israeli settlements grow. They have supported an international peace consensus, which calls for an end to the 38-year Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (Palestinian territories).

Unfortunately, according to Meron Benvenisti, former mayor of Jerusalem, the Israeli government has no intention of being bound by this international consensus. Israel plans to “end the occupation” by simply annexing the big settlement blocks in the West Bank to Israel itself. They will use the separation wall as a new border between Israel and Palestine and the Gaza “disengagement” as a smokescreen for this annexation.

Ariel Sharon would thus appear to be a “man of peace” opposing the extremist Jewish settlers of Gaza who refuse to leave. In reality, he is illegally annexing the real prize, the fertile Palestinian West Bank lands with their rich water resources.

The Israeli government, with help from the United States, says Benvenisti, would then attempt to force the new Palestinian leadership to accept this annexation in exchange for a new Palestine “state” made up of small disjointed reserves (“Bantustans”) in parts of the West Bank and Gaza.

The annexation plan was sealed at U.S. President George W. Bush’s Texas ranch in April 2005 and is openly promoted by Ariel Sharon in the Israeli press. It will result in the virtual imprisonment of three million Palestinians.

According to Benvenisti, this annexation will no doubt be resisted by the Palestinian population. Inevitably, that will end the current ceasefire

International law and the divestment campaign

In July 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) stated that the separation wall built on Palestinian land is illegal and that all states should do everything in their power to compel Israel to dismantle the wall (see detailed account of ICJ decision).

Inspired by the decision of the world’s highest court, international organizations, such as the World Council of Churches, the Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Canada, Israeli and other international peace groups, are calling for a divestment campaign against Israeli and other corporations that operate in the West Bank and Gaza.

Jeff Halper of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions and Professor Tanya Reinhart, a well-known Israeli peace activist, draw a comparison to South Africa. They insist that after 38 years of illegal occupation only international sanctions, boycotts and other pressure against Israel can bring peace to the region.

It’s not surprising that this new movement is inspired by the struggle against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s. Many observers, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, John Dugard, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, B’Tselem, the Israeli human rights organisation, and the Canadian Labour Congress (executive report, June 2002) compare the lack of human rights accorded Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to that of black South Africans in the apartheid era.



This is a typical Israeli checkpoint inside the occupied West Bank near Ramallah. Palestinians can be obliged to wait for hours to go to work, school or just to get health care. (Credit: Markus Cuel)

Wall and settlements or peace?

“Canadians have a choice,” according to James Grath, president of the Near East Cultural and Educational Foundation of Canada (NECEF). “We can support international law and campaign against occupation and for peace or we can side with further Israeli annexation of the West Bank and continued occupation and conflict.”

Labour organizations, including CUPE, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), the British Columbia Government Employees’ Union (BCGEU), the B.C. Federation of Labour as well as church and other human rights groups, are pressuring the government to take a stand for international law and peace in Israel/Palestine.

Unfortunately, powerful forces, such as the Liberal Parliamentarians for Israel, led by cabinet ministers Steven Owen and Irwin Cotler, and some elements of the Conservative party defend the continued occupation, the wall and the annexation plan.

Major media companies, such as Canwest/Global and The Globe and Mail, back these parties and refuse to publish any substantial critique of the Israeli settlement expansion, the ongoing wall construction or the Sharon/Bush annexation plan. These same media organizations will no doubt express shock and dismay at the inevitable Palestinian resistance to these policies.

The violence

Why is there so much violence in the Middle East?

“Israel, having ceased to care about the children of the Palestinians, should not be surprised when they come washed in hatred and blow themselves up in the centers of Israeli escapism. They consign themselves to Allah in our places of recreation, because their own lives are torture. They spill their own blood in our restaurants in order to ruin our appetites, because they have children and parents at home who are hungry and humiliated.”

Avraham Burg, Labor Party member and speaker of the Israeli Knesset from 1999 to 2003.

The violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories has come from both sides. Its human tragedies are equally devastating for all victims and their families. Innocents, including children, have been killed on and by both sides and both sides have violated international law.

But the violence by Israelis and by Palestinians cannot be equated. It does not have the same roots nor are the two sides guilty in the same way.

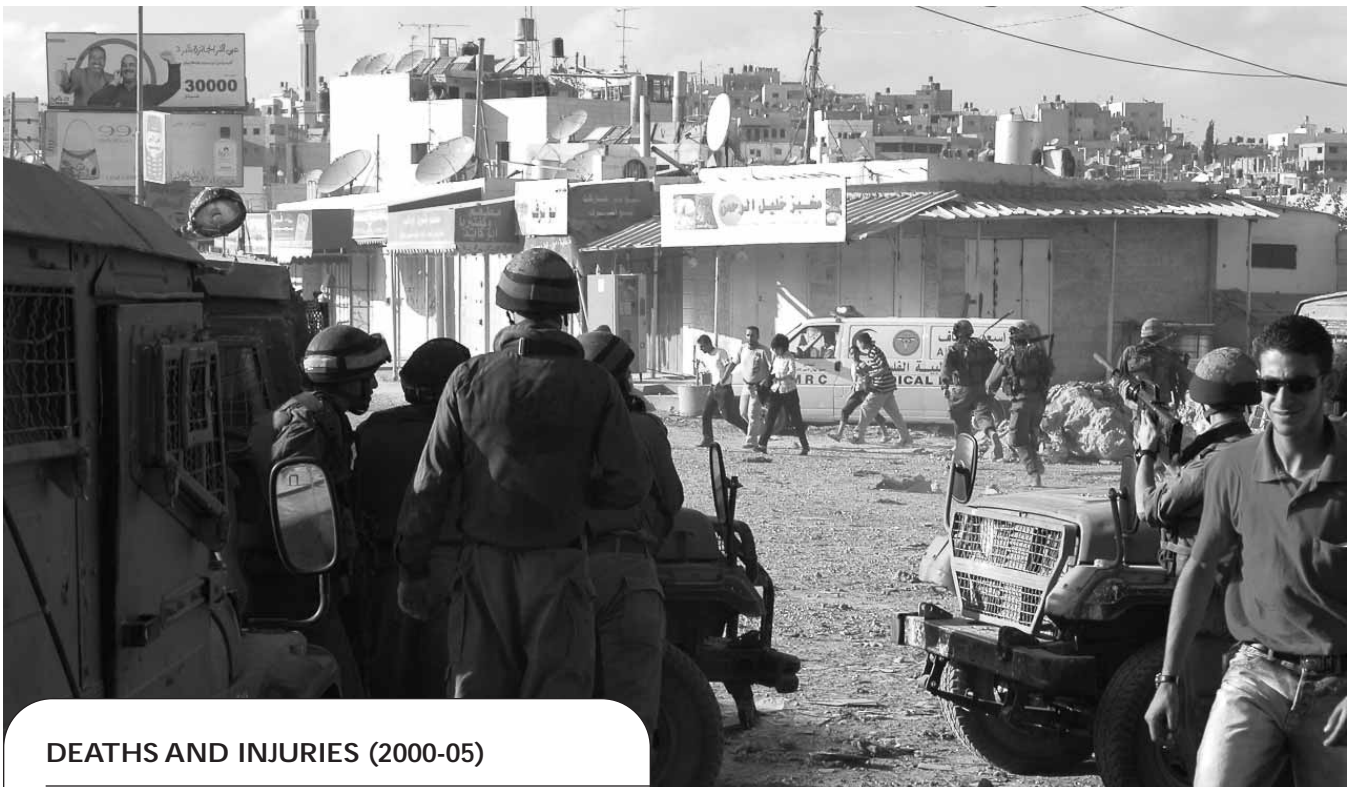
What we often hear described simply as “the violence” in the Middle East cannot be understood without understanding what the Israeli military occupation is really about.

Because military occupation is itself illegal, all Israeli violence in the Occupied Territories is in violation of international law, specifically the 1949 Geneva Convention, which identifies the obligation of an occupying power to protect the occupied population.

Palestinian violence historically has tended to be a violence of resistance. Palestinians have the legal right to resist against military targets and have done so in the past. However, the violence has changed in recent years as living conditions under the Israeli occupation have deteriorated dramatically and increasing numbers have lost hope and succumbed to desperation.

In the context of increased Israeli repression and the increased influence of organizations like Hamas, suicide bombings have been launched inside Israel, specifically targeting Israeli civilians.

These Palestinian attacks on civilians are themselves a violation of international law and are universally condemned. Unfortunately, after 38 years of brutal occupation, prominent Israelis are not surprised by these attacks.



DEATHS AND INJURIES (2000-05)

Palestinians	Deaths	3,600
	Child 0-18	680
	Injuries	28,700
Israelis	Deaths	1,050
	Child 0-18	118
	Injuries	7,175

All figures are approximate. Sources: Palestine Monitor, Israeli government website, Amnesty International

Israeli soldiers disperse a demonstration at Qalandia checkpoint in the West Bank. (Credit: Markus Cuel)

As the group, Jews for Justice in the Middle East, has stated, “As the periodic bloodshed continues in the Middle East, the search for an equitable solution must come to grips with the root cause of the conflict.”

The group says the conventional wisdom, suggesting that ‘even if both sides are at fault, the Palestinians are irrational “terrorists” who have no point of view worth listening to’, is wrong.

The group adds that “the Palestinians have a real grievance: their homeland for over a thousand years was taken, without their consent and mostly by force, during the creation of the state of Israel. And all subsequent crimes – on both sides – inevitably follow from this original injustice.”

For example, Avraham Burg, former Israeli parliamentarian and former chair of the Jewish Agency for Israel, notes that: “We could kill a thousand ringleaders and engineers a day and nothing will be solved, because the leaders come up from below – from the wells of hatred and anger, from the [Israeli] ‘infrastructures’ of injustice and moral corruption.”

The occupation (1967 to 2005)

What it's like to live in the Occupied Territories

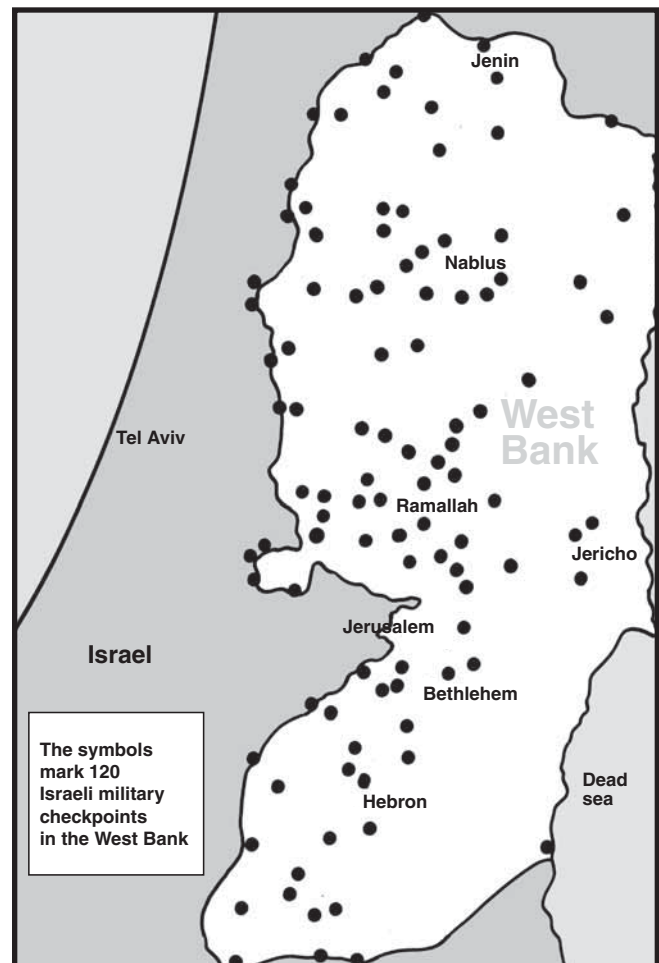
"Israel has created in the occupied territories a regime of separation based on discrimination, applying two separate systems of law in the same area and basing the rights of individuals on nationality. This regime is the only one of its kind in the world and is reminiscent of distasteful regimes in the past, such as the apartheid regime in South Africa."

B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights, an Israeli non-governmental organization, on the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

After its victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, the Palestinian territory previously under the control of Jordan and Egypt (see history section).

The West Bank is about the size of Prince Edward Island. About 2.2 million Palestinians live there. Since 1967, Israel has installed about 400,000 Jewish settlers from all parts of the world in the occupied area. They live in over 120 special settlements surrounded by over 120 military checkpoints.

Settlement creation is a violent process where the Israeli military decrees that Palestinian land is "state land" in the West Bank and Gaza. Then it fences off the land, expels the former owners, invites only Jewish settlers to take possession and sets up an armed camp to defend the settlements.



Here is what Palestinians experience on a daily basis in the Occupied Territories:

Ghettos

In Gaza, 45 km long by about 10-12 km wide, there are 1.2 million Palestinians crowded into shantytowns and 6,500 new Jewish settlers who live in California-style suburbs. The latter occupy 30 per cent of Gaza. A massive electric fence surrounds the whole of Gaza and is guarded by the Israeli Army.

A series of privileges enjoyed only by Jews exists in the West Bank and Gaza. There is a system of Jewish-only bypass roads that Palestinians are prohibited from using. The region is studded with Jewish-only settlements and schools.

Palestinians are allowed to travel only with the permission of Israeli military authorities, while Israeli settlers are free to move about.

Barach Kimmerling, Israeli professor at Hebrew University, calls Gaza the “biggest concentration camp ever to exist.” Soon the West Bank may have this honour with the building of another separation wall.

Water

Israel uses 85 per cent of the ground water available in the West Bank. This accounts for 25 per cent of Israel’s water use. Since 1967, the Israelis have permitted the occupied Palestinians to dig only 23 new wells.

Occupied Palestinians are allocated about 17 gallons (70 litres) of water per day. The minimum daily standard recommended by the World Health Organization is 100 litres per day.

Israeli settlers consume 150 gallons (600 litres) per day. Israeli settlements have in-ground swimming pools and sprinkler-watered lawns. Many Palestinian villages have parched land with insufficient water pressure even for a household tap.

Collective punishment

The Israeli Army, the fourth strongest military power in the world, has ordered blanket closures of schools and universities in the West Bank and Gaza. It has imposed curfews and detained Palestinians for up to five years without a trial or charge. About 7,000 Palestinians now are imprisoned in Israeli jails.

The army has humiliated the Palestinians daily at military checkpoints, demolished their homes, uprooted olive trees, destroyed orchards and targeted for assassination anyone they deem a “terrorist.”

The army claims that these acts are necessary to fight terrorism. But B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights organization, and the Palestinian Committee for Human Rights disagree. They call these measures "collective punishment" of Palestinians contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

House demolitions

Since 2000, the Israeli Army has demolished over 3,000 Palestinian houses and apartment buildings in the West Bank and Gaza, leaving the occupants homeless and their possessions lost.

Newspapers often mention that a suicide bomber's house has been destroyed by a bulldozer. The suicide bomber is dead; the destroyed house punishes the living. Here's one example among many.

On Sept. 5, 2003, 30 Israeli Army vehicles came to a seven-storey apartment building in the city of Nablus looking to arrest a Palestinian man. There was a shootout and the Palestinian man was killed.

The army, which had ordered the residents to leave the building, then planted explosives on the first floor and the building was completely leveled by the explosion. As a result, 48 Palestinians (eight families including 30 children) became homeless.

"I cannot begin to describe how horrible and obscene it is to watch the deliberate destruction of a family's home while that family watches powerless to stop it," said Sara Roy, an economics professor at Harvard University and the child of Holocaust survivors.

"For Jews, as for Palestinians, a house represents far more than a roof over one's head, it represents life itself," she told the second annual "Holocaust Remembrance" lecture on Nov. 14, 2002.

Curfew

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian citizens continue to be imprisoned in their homes for days, leaving only when the Israeli Army allows them to go for short breaks to purchase basic goods. This form of collective punishment fortunately has declined since the recent ceasefire.

Enforcement of the curfew is done with live bullets. Listen to Alam Ghanem, a 19-year old manual labourer and resident of Jenin, as he describes what happened to him as cited in "Lethal Curfew", a report from B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights.

"On Wednesday, July 24, I left my house with a friend of mine, Muhammad Nasri, on my way to the market as the curfew had been lifted that day. Around 4 p.m., we heard people in the street announce that soldiers were entering the city even though the curfew had been lifted.

"A short while later, we heard tanks approaching the square which had only a few young people and children at the time. The children, aged eight to 15, intended to start an altercation with the soldiers. I did not throw stones at the soldiers.

"The tanks, armored personnel carriers and two Jeeps continued on their way towards the square, firing as they went. One of the soldiers declared a curfew, calling out on a bullhorn: 'Residents of Jenin, a curfew has been imposed. Violators will be punished'.



A Palestinian family stands in the ruins of their former home as an Israeli bulldozer passes. (Credit: Darrell Ell)

“Muhammad and I went into the welfare office, which is located about 15 to 20 meters south-east of the square. We stood and watched eight young people. After five minutes passed, we got tired of waiting and decided to peek out at the soldiers. A soldier who was in the back of the Jeep saw me and fired a few bullets at us. One of the bullets hit Muhammad in the fingers and another hit me in the right side of my midsection.

“I fell to the ground. The gunfire continued. Young people who were nearby dragged me through the city’s alleyways to an ambulance that took me to a hospital. I was hospitalized for one day and then transferred to a hospital in Jerusalem where I remained for 16 days.”

No movement – No work

Closure, the checkpoints and the curfew make it almost impossible to hold a job or to operate a small business. Nasri Musa is a taxi driver in a village near Ramallah (West Bank). From the first day of the uprising (Intifada), the Israeli Army blocked the only road from his village, preventing residents from entering or leaving. Here is what he told B’Tselem, the human rights centre.

“I drive the taxi to the Ramallah\Bir Zeit route. The fixed costs for the taxi are NIS 60 a day: for the taxi number, taxes and insurance. Since the closures started, I get into the taxi, drive to the checkpoint and beg the soldiers to let me leave the village towards Bir Zeit, so that I can work but they refuse...”



Tulkam, July 2003: The Palestinian family's home was destroyed because the eldest son was implicated in attacks on Israeli settlers. The neighbour's home was destroyed in the explosion. (Credit: Darrell Ell)

"I support the 10 members of my family and don't know what to do. My children and I have reached the starvation stage. Everything we had in the house is gone and we don't have anything to eat. Even the grocery stores are empty."

For the majority of Palestinians, the occupation means no work, few medical services and a complete cessation of normal life. About 66 per cent of Palestinians live on less than \$2 a day and there is up to 70 per cent unemployment.

Health care

The closures and checkpoints put lives in jeopardy. More than 70 per cent of the Palestinian population lives in rural areas that do not provide hospital services. They need quick access to hospitals, which checkpoints prevent. Thirty-nine Palestinian women have given birth at checkpoints, causing a number of infant deaths.

"What is happening in the Territories is a process of slow and steady genocide," said Tanya Reinhart, a linguistics professor at Tel Aviv University. "People die from being shot and killed, many die from their wounds – the number of wounded is enormous, it is in the tens of thousands."

"Often, people cannot get medical treatment, so someone with a heart attack will die at a road-block because they cannot get to the hospital. There is a serious shortage of food, so there is malnutrition of children. The Palestinian society is dying – daily – and there is hardly any awareness of this in Israeli society."

Palestinian ambulance paramedics and other medical personnel are in constant danger. The Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committee reports that 25 Palestinian Red Crescent Society ambulances have been destroyed in 197 attacks between September 2000 and December 2002.

Fifteen medical personnel have been killed while carrying out their duties. Another 275 medical personnel have been injured, mostly shot at or beaten by the Israeli Army during the same period.

The well-known Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said has said that despite the enormous hardship of occupation, Palestinian society has neither been defeated nor crumbled completely. Said, who died in September 2003, added that in Palestine alone there are more than 1,000 non-governmental agencies. It is this kind of activity that has kept society alive and steadily revitalizes it.

"The Palestinians have refused to surrender even under the collective punishment meted out by the combined might of the United States and Israel," he said.

The occupation and the Israelis

It also hurts Israel

According to polls, the majority of Israelis are prepared to give up the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza and live in peace on the 78 per cent of Palestine now called Israel.

These Israelis recognize that the occupation also hurts Israel; Israeli citizens and army reserve members are also getting killed. The occupation is so expensive that Israeli social services are severely cut back. Tourism and other related industries are in a severe slump and the society has become militarized and frightened. Many of these Israelis simply do not want to occupy another people.

However, Israeli politics continues to be dominated by political parties (Labour, Likud, and a variety of smaller, religious parties) that have never renounced their desire to control and settle 100 per cent of historic Palestine. For the past 38 years, the major parties have encouraged Israelis to settle in the West Bank and Gaza by providing them with financial and other incentives.

There is a small but vigorous Israeli peace movement, led by such groups as Gush Shalom, Ta' Ayush and the Israel Committee Against House Demolitions. There is also a group of more than 500 Israeli soldiers, known as the refuseniks, who have refused to serve in the Occupied Territories.

This peace movement supports the international consensus that peace can only arrive when the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is brought to an end. It has been actively defending Palestinian human rights in the Occupied Territories.

This movement belongs to that great tradition in the Jewish community. As that South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu noted:

“In our struggle against apartheid, the great supporters were Jewish people. They almost instinctively had to be on the side of the disenfranchised, of the voiceless ones, fighting injustice, oppression and evil. I have continued to feel strongly with the Jews. I am patron of a Holocaust centre in South Africa. I believe Israel has a right to secure borders.... What is not so understandable, not justified, is what it did to another people to guarantee its existence.”
(The Guardian, April 30, 2002.)



Two activists express their views on the refugee question.

End the occupation

The international consensus

The international community, through United Nations resolutions and the 1949 Geneva Convention, has developed a framework for a just peace in Israel and Palestine. The framework says:

- Israel must end the occupation of West Bank and Gaza, leave the settlements and withdraw to the 1967 borders. An Israeli state within the 1967 borders would have 78 per cent of historic Palestine.
- A Palestinian state would be formed in the West Bank and Gaza (Palestine would have 22 per cent of historic Palestine).
- Both Israel and Palestine would have secure borders and be recognized internationally. All violence against citizens, whether Palestinian or Israeli, would end immediately.
- There would be a just settlement of the Palestinian refugee question based on U.N. resolution 194 (Right of Return). Israel and Palestine would negotiate the details of such a settlement. This would allow for Palestinians, forced from their homes when Israel was established, to return home or to receive financial compensation for their expulsion.

(The Palestinian right of return can be compared to the right of native Canadians living in B.C. to have their land claims negotiated. While the specific terms and conditions of a just resolution of native land claims is open to negotiation, any resolution requires the initial agreement from all sides to acknowledge the Canadian government's responsibility in creating the problem in the first place as well

as its responsibility to negotiate just terms and conditions.)

- A permanent international administrative regime would be established in Jerusalem, allowing it to serve as capital city for both Israel and Palestine.

Countries around the world have accepted the basic elements of this consensus. Only Israel and the United States have failed to accept them.

The Israeli government, backed economically and militarily by the U.S., refuses to end the occupation and withdraw to its 1967 borders. Israel rejects the idea that Jerusalem should be the capital of both states and, in fact, has “annexed” all of Jerusalem. It refuses to accept any responsibility for the role it played in creating the plight of Palestinian refugees. It rejects the Palestinian right of return in principle, either the actual return of refugees or the responsibility to provide financial compensation.

Israel claims that it is taking these hard-line positions because the Palestinians want to drive them into the sea. Despite their initial opposition to the existence of Israel as a Jewish state, the Palestinians have changed this position.

In 1988, the Palestinian National Council accepted a historic compromise, based on a two-state solution, granting 78 per cent of the territory that was historic Palestine to Israel and 22 per cent to a Palestinian state (West Bank and Gaza).

The vast majority of Palestinians do not wish to destroy Israel. But they are determined to establish their own state.

The history of the conflict

Follow the land

There's an old expression that if you want to know what's happening, follow the money. It applies to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But in this case, to understand the conflict, you must follow the land.

In 1880, Palestinian Arabs lived in and cultivated almost 100 per cent of Palestine between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. In 2003, the Israeli Jews control 100 per cent of the same territory. The Palestinians have been pushed into small ghettos in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel itself.

In 1880, the total population of Palestine (today called Israel, the West Bank and Gaza) was about 500,000. Of those, 27,000 were religious Jews (who did not want a Jewish homeland in Palestine) but were integrated into the wider Palestinian society. The rest were Palestinian Muslims and Palestinian Christians. The territory was part of the Ottoman Empire.

Britain, France and the United States won the First World War, defeating Germany and the Ottoman Empire. The British took over the administration of Palestine and promised European Jews a homeland. It was a remarkable promise considering that Palestinian Arabs already inhabited the homeland.

PALESTINE: 1880

Population:	500,000	
Palestinian Arab	473,000	94.5%
Jewish	27,000	5.5%

PALESTINE: 1914

Population:	689,272	
Palestinian Arab	629,272	92%
Jewish	60,000	8%

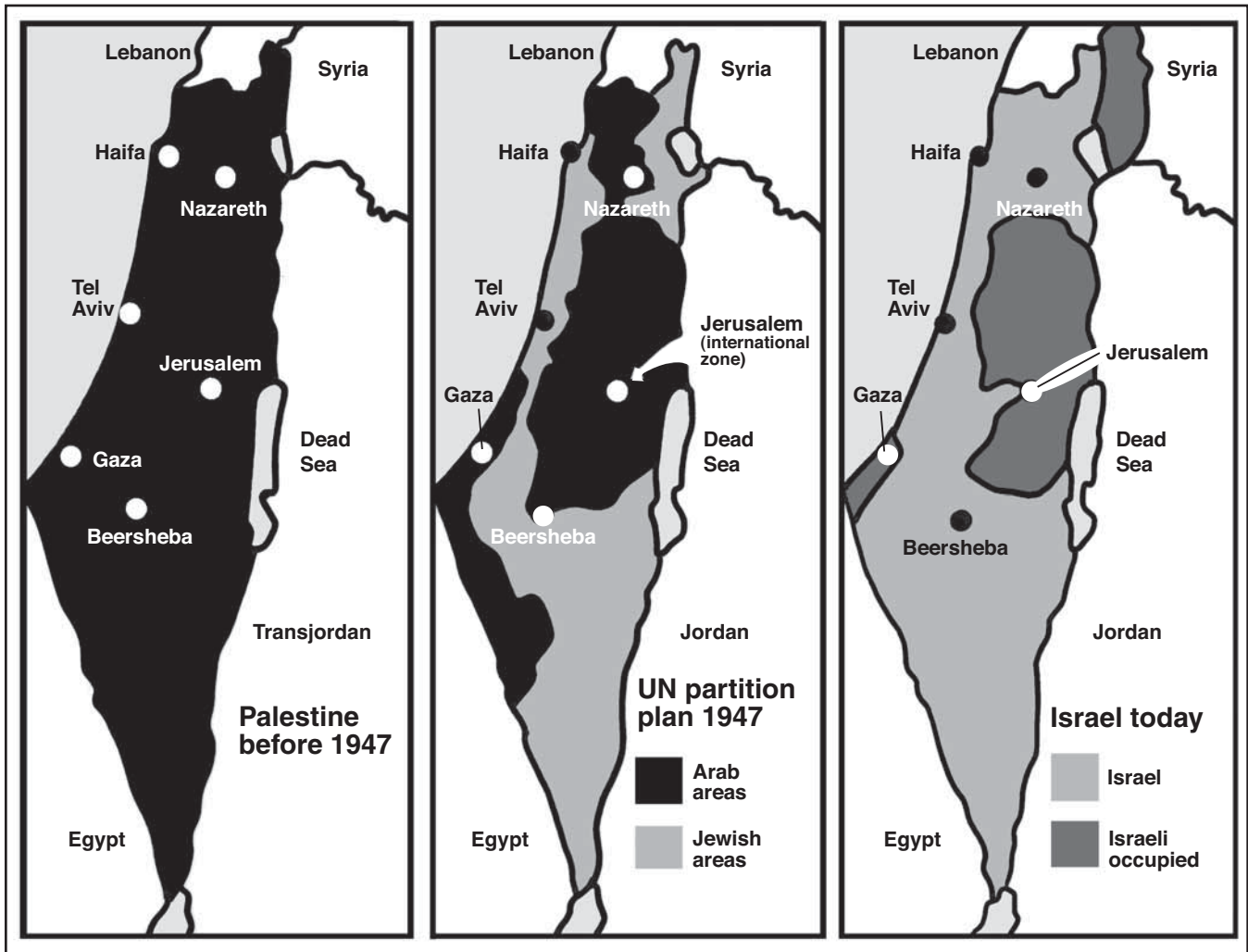
PALESTINE: 1947

Population:	1,912,112	
Palestinian Arab	1,303,887	68%
Jewish	608,225	32%

Between 1895-1945, about 400,000 Jews emigrated from Europe to Palestine to escape oppression and the Nazi Holocaust which murdered six million Jews. Many of the survivors wanted to emigrate to the U.S. and Canada but these doors were closed due to anti-Semitism within these governments. As a result, tens of thousands of European Jews went to Palestine.

In 1947, the U.S.-dominated United Nations called for the splitting of Palestine into a Jewish state, Israel (56 per cent), an Arab state (43 per cent) and Jerusalem, an international city. This split occurred despite the fact that the Jewish population was only 33 per cent of the population and owned only about 6 per cent of the land in Palestine. The Arab state was never formed.

In 1947, Palestine was undivided. That year the U.N. divided it, giving 55% to the Jewish population and 45% to the Palestinians. In 1949, Israel conquered 78% of the land. In 1967, Israel occupied 100%. In 2003, it continues to occupy 100% of historic Palestine.



In 1948, the Palestinians opposed the U.N. plan to give 56 per cent of Palestine for a Jewish homeland. Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, summed up the Palestinian position in The Jewish Paradox.

“Why should the Arabs make peace?” he asked. “If I was an Arab leader, I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural: we have taken their country. Sure, God promised it to us, but what does that matter to them? Our God is not theirs. We come from Israel, it’s true, but two thousand years ago, and what is that to them? There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler,

Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They only see one thing: we came here and stole their country. Why should they accept that?”

Then came the 1948 Israeli “War of Independence” (the Palestinians called it “Nakba” or Catastrophe). As a result:

- About 750,000 Palestinians (three-quarters of the Palestinian population) inside the newly formed Israel fled. The Israeli government contends that Palestinians were ordered to flee by hostile Arab regimes in the region. Several Israeli historians have shown that Israeli military terror was the main cause of the flight. Some 400 Palestinian villages were destroyed and the land was confiscated.
- Israel was formed and it conquered all of Palestine, except the West Bank and Gaza. It now controlled 78 per cent of Palestine instead of the U.N.-allotted 56 per cent.
- U.N. resolution 194 mandated the Palestinian right of return inside the new state of Israel.

And so it remained until the “Six-Day War” in 1967, when Israel occupied 100 per cent of historic Palestine, including the West Bank and Gaza. In response, the U.N. passed resolutions 242 and 338, calling on Israel to withdraw to its previous borders in exchange for peace.

But Israel never withdrew. Instead, it started building settlements in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, with unprecedented support and financing from the U.S. government. The occupation began in contravention of international law.

In 1949, the U.N. had passed the Fourth Geneva Convention. Article 49 states that: “The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer part of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.” Article 33 says “No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited.” The convention was passed to prevent a repeat of the Nazi German settlements in Eastern Europe in the Second World War.

In 1993, the Oslo accords were signed. The new Palestinian Authority got some limited control over a tiny portion of the West Bank and Gaza. But the occupation continued, awaiting “final” negotiations over the status of Jerusalem, the refugees and the Palestinian state.

In 2000, the “Oslo Peace Process” failed because Israel doubled the number of illegal settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinians rose up against the oppression of daily life in occupied West Bank and Gaza in what became known as the second Intifada. The Israelis invaded and re-occupied the Palestinian-controlled area.

After 9/11, Israel depicted its project of occupying Palestinian land as part of the war against terror, portraying the Palestinians as terrorists.



In December 2001, 114 signatories to the Fourth Geneva Convention met and condemned the Israeli settlements as illegal and in contravention of the convention. The U.S., Israel and Australia – each of which is a signatory state – boycotted the meeting.

In 2003, the U.S. and Great Britain invaded Iraq without U.N. approval. U.S. President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair put forward the “Road Map” to try and kick start the “peace process” and to placate the Arab populations in the region who were angry about a second occupation in Iraq.

In July 2003, the Road Map restated that the peace must be based on U.N. resolutions and called for “reforms” in the Palestinian political arena. It spoke to the creation of a viable Palestinian state by 2005 without specifying its borders. The Road Map’s main goal is to convince part of the Palestinian leadership to police the resistance against the occupation. A ceasefire was agreed.

In September 2003, Bush blamed Palestinian terrorism for the breach of the ceasefire and weakening of the Road Map. But Uri Avnery, the Israeli peace activist, argued that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was opposed to the Road Map and that he had sabotaged it by killing Hamas members, starting the vicious cycle of targeted assassinations and suicide bombings.

To put the nail in the coffin of the Road Map, the Israelis rushed to build a new 25-foot high “Separation” wall inside the West Bank. The wall will be about 600 km long as it snakes its way through the West Bank. The Berlin Wall, by comparison, was 10 feet high and 155 km long.

The Israelis claim that they need the wall for security, that is, to prevent suicide bombers from entering Israel. However, the wall is not constructed on Israel’s border with the West Bank (the Green Line) but right inside the West Bank itself, annexing yet more land to Israel.



A Palestinian farmer waiting to reach a village near Qalqiliya. The electrified fence is opened only 2-3 times a day and the soldiers often let the Palestinians wait for hours under the sun. (Credit: Markus Cuel)

“The Wall is to guarantee that a free and sovereign Palestinian state will become impossible,” said Jamal Juma, coordinator of the Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network.

Peace activists inside and outside Israel criticize the wall, insisting that only political solutions, such as an end to the occupation and a willingness to address longstanding Palestinians grievances, can bring security to all parties.

It is not surprising that countless attempts to revive the “peace process” have failed since the occupation began in 1967. The stronger party, Israel, while talking peace, is constantly increasing settlement activity. A Palestinian, interviewed by Brooke Atherton of International Solidarity Movement, said: “All of these talks and agreements...this is just for the media. I won’t want to hear it on TV, I want to see it on the land.”

The wall must fall

International Court of Justice decision, July 2004



Israelis and Palestinians demonstrate against the construction of the Wall (August 2003).
(Credit: Markus Cuel)

On July 9, 2004, 14 judges of the world's highest court, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague, determined that the wall or “security fence.” as some Israelis call it, is illegal.

The court said Israel must dismantle the wall and pay compensation to Palestinians, who have suffered devastating losses of livelihood and agricultural land as a result of its construction.

Most importantly, the ICJ ruled that all nations have an “obligation...to ensure Israel complies with international law.”

Earlier decisions by the ICJ on the illegal South African occupation of Namibia and the Indonesian occupation of East Timor were influential because they hastened the eventual independence of these countries.

This time, the court found that Israel’s policy of settlement occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, which began in 1967, was contrary to international law – in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention. It stated in article 49 that “The occupying power shall not deport or transfer part of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies...”

The ICJ determined that the wall was constructed in part to defend the same illegal settlements and was thus itself illegal. The court rejected Israeli arguments that the wall was a legitimate defensive measure against terrorism.

The ICJ said the wall was built almost entirely on Palestinian land in the West Bank and that 975 square kilometres – or 16.6 per cent of the West Bank – already had been incorporated into Israel. According to Israel, this land is now a “closed territory” which, when completed, will cut off 160,000 Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank. Palestinians living in the area cannot move in or out without a permit, while non-residents may not enter the area at all. The wall has made it impossible for the Palestinians to exercise their right to self-determination.

The ICJ said that no state should recognize the illegal wall as legitimate and that every state should work to dismantle it.



A Palestinian child, standing in front of the separation wall in the West Bank city of Qalqiliya. Qalqiliya is a city near the green line, and completely surrounded by the wall. (Credit: Markus Cuel)

Twelve days after the court's announcement, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly agreed to implement the ICJ decision, voting 150-6 in favour of dismantling the wall, with 10 abstentions. The United States, Israel and Australia opposed the resolution. Canada abstained. A month later, despite the ruling, the Israeli government announced that it would continue to build the wall.

Debate on the wall and annexation

Some Israeli and North American commentators have suggested that the wall's route has now been altered and that it will enclose 7.5 per cent of the West Bank, not the 16 per cent suggested in the ICJ decision.

Gush Shalom, the Israeli peace group, and Electronic Intifada, an American website, argue that while the actual wall route annexes about 10 per cent of the West Bank, the Israeli government plans to annex almost 50 per cent.

They would do this either by extending an eastern section of the wall in the Jordan Valley (West Bank) or by annexing lands adjacent to settlements in the Jordan Valley.

In the wake of the ICJ decision, a group of Canadian church and human rights groups has launched a campaign to defend international law and to get the Canadian government to implement the ICJ decision. These groups believe that international relations should be based on the rule of law and not on military power.

For more information on this campaign, visit www.Canpalnet.ca. To read the ICJ decision, go to <http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/idocket/imwp/imw-pframe.htm>.

Key players

Israel, Britain and the United States

Until the Second World War, Britain was the key European player in the Middle East. The British government initially supported the founding of the state of Israel when it announced its support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine in the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

The British supported the creation of a Jewish homeland for several reasons. Britain wanted to control the route between Europe and India. Palestine was a key part of that route. In addition, the British government sought support from both Russian and American Jews in the First World War against Germany and the Ottoman Empire. It believed that by agreeing to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine, these Jews would support the British war effort.

Furthermore, in 1917 some members of the British cabinet were “Christian Zionists”. That is, they believed the biblical dictum that the Jews must return to the Holy Land before the second coming of Christ. Others were outright anti-Semitic and wanted Jews out of Britain.

The United States supported the creation of Israel in 1948, but a “special relationship” developed only after 1967 when the U.S. realized that Israel could play an important role as a Cold War ally and partner for joint control of the Middle East. Since that time, U.S. support for Israel has emerged in several ways.

Israel receives 25 per cent of the U.S. foreign aid budget. That’s about \$5 billion a year if we include tax-exempt contributions that Americans make to Israel.

In addition, Israel has access to the most advanced weapons systems in the U.S. arsenal. Most of the weapons used in the Occupied Territories, including Apache helicopter gun ships, F-16 fighter bombers and armed caterpillar bulldozers, come from the U.S. Israel also now has significant nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, thanks to U.S. help.

During the Cold War, the U.S. relied on Israel’s military power as an extension of its own. Israel provided arms and support for U.S. allied dictatorships in Chile, Nicaragua, Mozambique and South Africa.

At the U.N. and in other international arenas, the U.S. protects Israel from being held accountable for its violations of international law. After 1967, U.S. opposition to U.N. resolutions critical of Israel became pronounced. Most of the U.S. vetoes cast in the U.N. Security Council in the 1980s and 1990s served to protect Israel from international sanction.

On Sept. 16, 2003, the U.S. opposed the condemnation of Israel’s decision to “remove” Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. The U.N. General Assembly vote was 133 countries for, four against (U.S., Israel, Micronesia, Marshall Islands). Canada abstained.

Canada and the conflict

We have a history

Since 1967, Canada's written policy towards Israel-Palestine has been guided by United Nations Security Council resolution 242, calling for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Occupied Territories. In practice, however, Canada refuses to demand that Israel actually implement this policy.

When resolutions from human rights and other organizations and countries come before the U.N. condemning Israeli action in the Occupied Territories, Canada has a history of either abstaining or running interference for the U.S. and Israel.

Canada continues to support Israeli settlement in the West Bank and Gaza by giving tax breaks to contributors to the Jewish National Fund. This registered Canadian charity owns and develops land in the Occupied Territories and in Israel exclusively for Jewish use (excluding 20 per cent of Israeli citizens who are not Jewish and are mostly Palestinian).

Unlike Israeli newspapers, which routinely comment on the Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza, Canadian media largely ignore the targeted assassinations, curfews, house demolitions and the separation wall inflicted daily on the Palestinians. Instead, they tend to highlight only the small number of people involved in the suicide bombings and their victims.

Canadian workers will recognize this pattern as our media usually ignore employer attacks, cutbacks and concession demands but will comment widely on strikes and lament how workers are responsible for public inconvenience and economic loss.

Questions and answers

Why is the Israel-Palestine conflict so important? Why does the rest of the world care and get so involved in this conflict?

Global interest in Israel-Palestine reflects two different kinds of concern: personal (including religious affiliation and national ethnic bonds) and strategic (including military, diplomatic and other considerations).

On the personal level, as the site of holy places of all three of the world's main monotheistic religions (one God), it is perhaps inevitable that passions will run high.

Strategically, in its earliest days, Palestine was the crossroads of trade between three continents. Since 1967, Israel has played an important role as a Cold War ally and sometimes surrogate, of the United States.

Today, Israel stands as one of closest allies of the U.S. For most nations, maintaining good relations with the U.S. requires at least friendly ties to Israel.

Palestine is at the symbolic centre of Arab consciousness, giving it a regional and international significance far beyond its size. Symbolically, Palestinians have come to represent the enduring force of resistance. Palestine is also, since the independence of East Timor, one of the last colonies in the world occupied by another nation.

Why is Israel so often criticized at the United Nations? Aren't other countries just as guilty of human rights violations?

There are many countries in the U.N. that commit human rights violations. The international community criticizes Israel because of its violations of Palestinian human rights. These are also violations of international law and many U.N. resolutions.

That is because the specific violations often targeted by those resolutions – building settlements, demolition of Palestinian houses, military attacks on civilians, closures and curfews, etc. – all take place in the context of a military occupation which is itself illegal.

Other countries – Algeria, Sierra Leone, Uzbekistan and many more – commit massive human rights violations against their own populations. But Israel does so against a population that is supposed to be protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention, guaranteeing safety for people living under occupation.

Who was Yasser Arafat? Why did the United States and Israel dislike him?

Yassar Arafat was the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) from 1969 to 2004. He was elected president of the Palestinian Authority in 1996 in internationally supervised elections.

Even after his death, Arafat remains a symbol of Palestinian resistance, but many progressive Palestinians consider him and his administration to have been undemocratic and corrupt. These progressive Palestinians are building a third political force in Palestinian society to offset both Islamic fundamentalists (Hamas) and the corrupt element of the Palestinian Authority.

The U.S. and Israel accused him of being a “terrorist leader,” but he was welcomed at the White House in the 1990s when he went along with the Americans and signed the Oslo peace accords.

Now some commentators feel that the real reason George W. Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon wanted Arafat replaced is because, under pressure from the Palestinian people, he didn’t accept a deal that did not meet the minimum requirements of international law. He also refused to start a civil war in the Occupied Territories by attacking Hamas, even though he declared his opposition to the suicide bombings.

Is opposing Israeli actions and policies anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish?

Anti-Semitism is racist discrimination and hatred against Jews. It irrationally blames or scapegoats Jews for society’s problems, such as when right-wing parties in Europe and North America blamed Jews for the Depression in the 1930s. The Nazi Holocaust, which killed six million Jews, was historically the most extreme and horrific example of anti-Semitism.

While some Islamic fundamentalist critics of Israel are undoubtedly anti-Semitic, opposing the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is not.

Thousands of progressive Jews and others, both in North America and Israel, are opposed to the occupation and the settlements. They include Jews for a Just Peace, the New Democratic Party, the World Council of Churches, trade unions, etc.

Many prominent right-wing individuals and groups (Conrad Black, George W. Bush, Izzy Asper), Jewish and non-Jewish, support the Israeli government policy of occupation and settlement.

It really is a question of progressive politics vs. right-wing politics.

Resources

There are many Canadian, Palestinian, Israeli and United States sources that provide a fuller understanding of the conflict. We recommend the following:

Trade Union Committee for Justice in the Middle East (TUCJME) – A group of trade unionists from British Columbia who support the End the Occupation Movement. For more information or to join the organization and/or their email list which provides weekly updates from a labour perspective, contact tucjme@telus.net.

Palestine is still the question – Excellent 50-minute film introduction to the Israel/Palestine conflict by noted journalist John Pilger. Available for presentation to local union committees or meetings. Contact TUCJME or CUPE BC's International Solidarity Committee.

Understanding the Palestinian Israeli Conflict – An excellent primer on the conflict by Phyllis Bennis, published by Tara. It poses many of the questions from both a historical and a current viewpoint with maps, graphs and drawings. Highly recommended. Can be purchased from TUCJME (Trade Union Committee for Justice in the Middle East).

Stop the Wall Campaign

The Palestinian campaign to stop the wall, www.penjon.org.

Canada Palestine Support Network – Excellent resource for information, campaigns and activities, particularly in Canada, www.canpalnet.ca/.

Canadian Jewish Outlook – Monthly progressive Jewish publication opposed to the occupation, cjoutlook@telus.net, www.vcn.bc.ca/outlook.

Electronic Intifada – Excellent source for daily news, <http://electronicintifada.net>.

Palestinian Centre for Human Rights – A source of daily news from the Occupied Territories and elsewhere in the Middle East, www.pchrgaza.org.

Palestine Monitor – Extensive and up-to-date information by a Palestinian non-governmental organization, www.palestinemonitor.org.

Gush Shalom – Very good website with detailed maps and other information of this important Israeli peace group, www.gushshalom.org/english/index.html.

Churches for Middle East Peace – Interdenominational group advocates End the Occupation, a shared Jerusalem between Israelis and Palestinians, www.cmep.org.

Ha-aretz Israeli Daily – This Israeli newspaper provides a wide-ranging perspective from Israeli government to Israeli peace movements, www.haaretzdaily.com.

Alternative Information Centre – Israeli/Palestinian organization for peace and social justice, www.alternative-news.org.

B'Tselem – Israeli non-governmental organization monitors human rights abuses of Palestinians in Occupied Territories. These research reports incorporate eye witness accounts, ID Israeli defence forces statements, verified independently, www.btselem.org.

Znet – Excellent progressive articles from all over the world every day on a lot of subjects including the Middle East, <http://www.zmag.org/znet.htm>.

Pamphlets, personal stories and analysis

- **Occupied Voices – Stories of Everyday Life**, by Wendy Pearlman (Thunder's Mouth Press, N.Y.).
- **In Search of Fatima, Ghada Karmi** (Verso Press).
- **The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab Wall**, by Avi Shlaim (Penguin, 2001).
- **The Fateful Triangle, the United States, Israel and the Palestinians**, by Noam Chomsky (South End Press Classics, 1999).
- **This Heated Place**, by Deborah Campbell (Douglas & McIntyre-Canada).

