

The Israeli annexation of the Jordan Valley



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The Jordan Valley has been under Israeli military occupation since 1967. Today the military installations, the expanding illegal settlements and the harsh restrictions on access and movement all threaten the survival of any Palestinian presence in the Valley.

It used to be home to about 250,000 Palestinians, mostly farmers and pastoralists; now they are reduced to less than 60,000, controlled and harassed by the 9,500 Israeli settlers living in 37 settlements and by the Israeli army.

The Valley constitutes one third of the territory of the West Bank but Palestinians are excluded from 94% of it. They are now concentrated in Jericho, 24 villages and dozens of small Bedouin communities.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated this year:

“The demolition of civilian Palestinian homes, as well as the transfer of Israeli settlers into the occupied territory, are strictly prohibited and must be brought to a halt.”

Occupation and land grab

Immediately after the occupation of the Jordan Valley in 1967 Israel declared the whole region a closed military area. The entire populations of a number of villages, including al-Himma, al-Sakut, Deir, al-Qa'un, Ein as-Sultan and the camp of Abu al-Jaj were expelled from their lands. About 650km² of the land immediately parallel to the river – the best agricultural land – was confiscated and fenced off, resulting in the displacement and expulsion of thousands of people.

Palestinian agriculture was severely hit and shepherds whose communities had used the lands for centuries were cut off from their traditional pastures.

Now Israeli state-owned and private agricultural companies harvest crops grown on the stolen Palestinian lands. This, with the exclusion of indigenous



Destroying a way of life

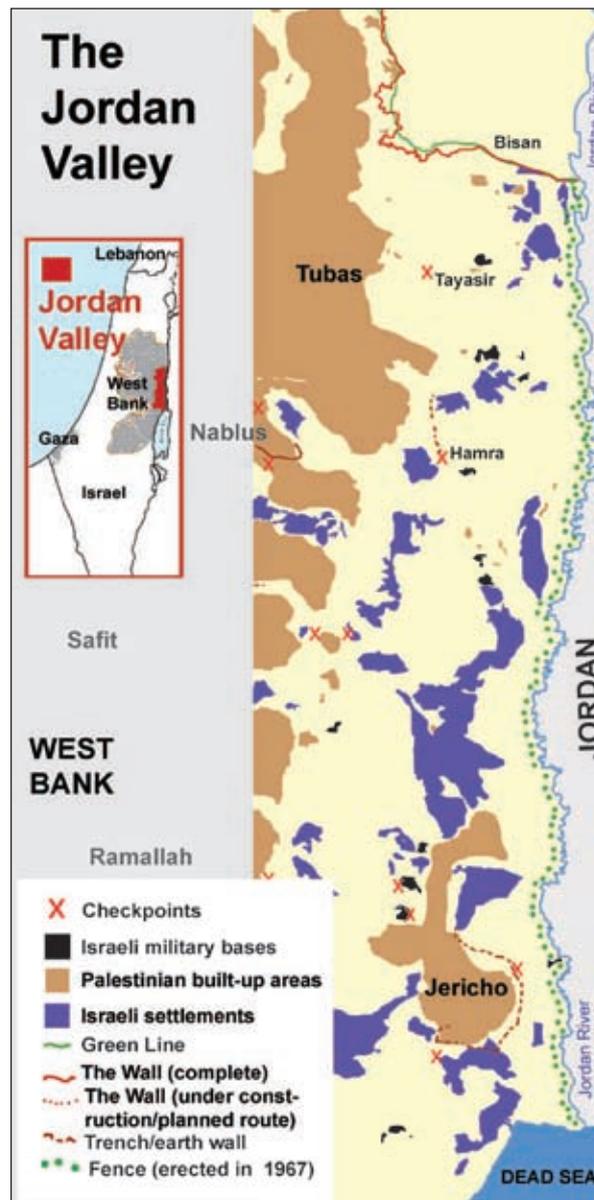
inhabitants and the imposition of settlements, amounts to *de facto* annexation, in direct contravention to the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which Israel is in fact a signatory.

In February 2006 the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert confirmed the government's intention to annex the Jordan Valley “as a security strip” and hence cut off any future Palestinian state's direct links to Jordan.

The destruction of the Palestinian economy

The policies of the Israeli government are systematically destroying the Palestinian agricultural economy. The land confiscation, checkpoints and closures reduce the possibility of cultivation. There is an imposed shortage of water, fertilisers and infrastructure.

Pasturing in the rural areas of Jericho and the Jordan Valley, once 80% of such land in the whole of the West Bank, is now virtually forbidden. The traditional cattle of the region, bred to survive on sparse pasturage, have almost disappeared. Restrictions have led to overgrazing of the



pastureland that is available and to the use of agricultural land for building, when Israel has refused permits to build on infertile land. Shepherds and farmers are regularly attacked by settlers and livestock die from heatstroke or cold when the Israeli army destroys their shelters.

Palestinians who are not residents of the Jordan Valley must obtain permits to enter the Valley by vehicle, permits which are rarely forthcoming, even for investors or Palestinians who own land there. This has effectively cut off an important agricultural and tourist area from the rest of the West Bank.

Markets for Palestinian agricultural produce in West Bank towns are cut off by a series of checkpoints. This means subsidised settlement goods can reach Palestinian markets while Palestinian produce is left to rot.

Access to markets in Israel is barred unless products are packaged and sold by Israeli agricultural companies like Carmel-Agrexco and Edom.

Supported by the Israeli government, the settlers have also developed highly profitable tourist, mineral and other businesses, including Ahava cosmetics.

The Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth and a worldwide attraction, is a major source of income for the Israeli tourist industry. The Israeli authorities have developed hotels, spas and sites such as the Ayn Fashkha Nature Reserves and the historic Qumran Caves just south of Jericho. Luxury hotels nearby, such as that run by the Kalia Kibbutz, welcome Israeli and foreign guests – but not Palestinians.

Further north, the small town of Sebastia is next to a number of very important archeological sites, dating back thousands of years. The Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has a long-standing request to excavate and develop these but has been barred from doing so by the Israeli authorities.

Water and the environment

Access to water has been systematically denied to the Palestinian farmers and residents of the Jordan Valley. Since 1967, within the closed military area along the Jordan River, 162 agricultural water projects developed during Jordanian rule have been closed to Palestinians, depriving thousands of people of their livelihoods.

Israel has gradually implemented policies creating extreme water shortages for the Palestinian population:

- Palestinians have been barred from their share of the Jordan River's water and its adjacent aquifers. According to OCHA, water consumption is only 20 litres per capita per day in most pastoral communities in the area, compared to the average settlement consumption of 300 l/c/d. (The WHO recommendation is a minimum of 100 l/c/d.)

- The Israeli state water company Mekorot monopolises the digging of wells, while Palestinians are prohibited from digging new wells or maintaining existing ones. Mekorot sells water to Palestinians at hugely inflated prices – ten times the amount settlers pay.

- Siting of new settler-only wells near Palestinian springs, so the Palestinian wells dry up or lose much of their water. In the village of Hamsa, for example, the springs upon which the community relied for generations have dried up after two huge water wells



A water tank in Frash Beit Dajan is destroyed under the protection of the Israeli army. Photo: stopthewall.org

were constructed for nearby settlements. The villagers now have to travel long distances for water for washing, drinking and watering their livestock.

- Declaration of areas with strategic water resources as military zones, when they have been used by Palestinians for centuries.

- Destruction by the army of water cisterns and wells and confiscation of diesel pumps and tractors used for transporting water tanks.

“They know that controlling water means controlling life,” says Fathy Khdirat, resident and coordinator of the Jordan Valley Solidarity campaign.

The level of the Dead Sea is sinking year by year, due to overuse by both Israeli and Jordanian factories. Similarly, the flow of the Jordan River has been drastically reduced and the water badly polluted.

Throughout the Occupied Territories the waste from Israeli settlements and factories is dumped on neighbouring Palestinian communities, causing serious environmental and health hazards. (For more detailed information see PSC factsheet on *Israel, Palestine and the environment*.)

Housing restrictions and demolitions

Since 1967 the Palestinian population of the Jordan Valley has been prohibited from all new building and restructuring. The Israeli army has demolished countless homes so that the majority of Palestinians now live in tents or shacks made from salvaged materials. In 2011 alone, the Israeli authorities demolished over 200 Palestinian-owned structures in the area, displacing around 430 people and affecting the livelihoods of another

Wilful ignorance?

Israeli society is largely ignorant of the reality of the situation. According to a public opinion survey carried out by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel in June 2011, 64 per cent of Jewish-Israeli respondents did not know that the Jordan Valley is an occupied territory. 80 per cent of those surveyed also believed that Jewish Israelis make up the majority of residents in the Jordan Valley.

1,200. Amenities such as schools, water tanks, electricity pylons and public toilets have all been under demolition orders in the last few years. Many communities are without basic amenities such as water and power, and attempts to generate electricity (e.g. by using solar panels) have been thwarted. Outside Jericho telecommunications are not permitted.

Meanwhile the illegal Israeli settlements continue to expand.



A family made homeless by the Israeli army

The illegal settlements

In 1968, Israel seized land belonging to the Palestinian village of Ein al-Beida, under its 'absentee property laws' allowing the seizure of Palestinian refugees' property, to establish the first settlement of Mehola.

Today 9500 settlers inhabit 37 settlements, or colonies, in breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This "explicitly prohibits the transfer of the Occupying Power's civilian population into the territory it occupies".

The illegal status of Israeli settlements has been confirmed both by the UN Security Council and the International Court of Justice.

Each settler living in the Jordan Valley receives a 75% discount for drinking water, electricity, telecommunications and transportation as well as free irrigation water and free education from the Israeli state. Each new settler receives 70 dunums of stolen Palestinian land and 1000 shekels from the state when they move to the valley. Settler farms also cultivate large portions of land inside 'closed military zones'.

Case study: The demolitions of Al Hadidiya and Humsa

Home demolitions in the Jordan Valley are often aimed at completely destroying communities. For many years the residents of Al Hadidiya and Humsa have been suffering harassment from the Israeli military. Their homes, tents, shacks and animal shelters, close to the illegal settlement of Ro'i, have been demolished a dozen times since 2007.

Checkpoints and pass laws

The Israeli stranglehold on Palestinian movement is maintained by a complex system of road blocks and checkpoints manned by Israeli soldiers. A Jordan Valley ID must be shown to pass through these, but these are only issued to Palestinians who actually live in the valley. Movement and access is controlled by both checkpoints and settlements, eg:

- The settlement of Taysir blocks the road to Tubas;
- Hamra isolates the Jordan Valley from the road to Nablus;
- Al-Awja blocks the road to Ramallah.

The occupation forces often do not allow men under thirty to pass through these checkpoints.



Villagers plan the defence of their land.

Photo: jordanvalleysolidarity.org

Palestinian workers on Israeli settlements

Deprived of their land, hundreds of Palestinians are obliged to work on Israeli settlements. Many live outside the valley and need a permit from their employers. Because of the checkpoints, it can take several hours to reach work.

Workers are paid around \$14 for 7–10 hours' work – 60% of the Israeli minimum wage. They are typically employed on casual contracts and receive no holiday pay, pension or sick pay. A large number of children, some as young as nine years old, are employed on the settlements.

Education and health

Education has virtually ground to a halt in the Jordan Valley. The prohibition on new building has put enormous strain on existing schools, which are overcrowded and lacking basic amenities. Children often have to travel for hours through military checkpoints to reach school.

Basic healthcare services are also woefully inadequate, with just five villages receiving clinical services for one hour, two days a week. Ambulances are in desperately short supply and medics are frequently harassed by soldiers and delayed at checkpoints.

Last spring, the Vittorio Arrigoni school (named in honour of the Italian activist killed in Gaza) at Ras Al-Waja was destroyed by Israeli military bulldozers.

Case study: the right to a school

In the villages of Fasayil and Jiftlick, local residents have defied Israeli military restrictions on building in order to give their children an education. In Jiftlick, the villagers began teaching their children in tents. Then they built a proper school, despite an injunction from the Israeli authorities. One villager said: 'They can knock down our school, we cannot stop them, but we will build it again and again, we will not lose the right to educate our children.'



The school at Fasayil, threatened with demolition

• Veolia is a company intimately involved with many aspects of the occupation. In the Jordan Valley it is responsible for bringing huge quantities of waste from Israel to landfill sites on Palestinian land.



Stolen goods?

More information on settlement and Israeli goods can be found on www.bigcampaign.org or email boycott@palestinecampaign.org.

The Israel-based **Who Profits** organisation (www.whoprofits.org) does valuable work exposing the involvement of Israeli and foreign companies in the illegal occupation of Palestinian land.

To support the people of the Jordan Valley directly, join **Jordan Valley Solidarity**, a network of local popular committees and international supporters (www.jordanvalleysolidarity.org). The Brighton – Jordan Valley group have worked closely with them for years and organise regular trips there (see www.brightonpalestine.org).

What you can do

As western governments refuse to act, it is up to individuals of conscience to make Israel understand that there is a price to be paid for its policies of theft and expulsion.

Boycotting Israeli goods is the most direct way of doing this (see PSC fact sheet on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions); many products come from settlements, and often settlement goods are mixed with produce from Israel itself.

- Agrexco is Israel's largest exporter of fresh agricultural produce, with annual sales of several hundred million dollars. Much of this produce comes from settlements in the Jordan Valley. In the UK Agrexco is known under the Carmel, Coral and Jaffa brands.

- Edom UK also imports large quantities of produce from Jordan Valley settlements, partly via the Valley Grown Salad brand.

Find out more

Much of the information on this factsheet derives from studies produced by the following organisations:

OCHA – UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (ochaopt.org): 'Humanitarian fact sheet on the Jordan Valley', Feb 2012

Save the Children UK (www.savethechildren.org.uk): 'Factsheet on the Jordan Valley' 2009

Applied Research Institute, Jerusalem (www.poica.org) for daily reports on Israel's activities in the Occupied Territories

B'tselem – Israeli Information Center for Human Rights (btselem.org): 'Dispossession and Exploitation'

Ma'an Development Center (www.ma-an-ctr.org): 'Draining away'; 'Eye on the Jordan Valley'

jordanvalleysolidarity.org for on-the-ground updates, actions, videos

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Or telephone: 020 7700 6192 and pay over the phone, or online: www.palestinecampaign.org

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