



בצלם - מרכז המידע הישראלי לזכויות האדם בשטחים (ע.ר.)

B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

B'Tselem 2003 Activity Report

INTRODUCTION

Throughout 2003, we saw a continuation of the grave human rights violations in the Occupied Territories that characterize the past three years. Severe restrictions on movement continue to impact every aspect of daily life for the entire Palestinian population. Palestinian attacks on civilians and excessive Israeli use of force continued with 582 Palestinians and 129 Israeli civilians killed this year alone.

The ongoing presence of the Israeli security forces at checkpoints and in Palestinian population centers results in daily harassment and humiliation and frequent incidents of violence toward Palestinians. Israel has continued detaining large numbers of Palestinians, with 5,900 held at year's end, including 649 administrative detainees. The use of house demolitions as punishment by Israel has increased substantially with more than 450 houses demolished since mid-2002, in addition to continued administrative demolitions, particularly along the route of the Separation Barrier. In addition, we have witnessed the continued building and expansion of settlements, and widening of the "security zones" around settlements at the expense of Palestinian land.

Israel has moved forward rapidly with the construction of the Separation Barrier, completing construction of the first 150 kilometers in July. Plans for the next two stages, which run deep into the West Bank, were approved by the government and are currently under construction. The original plan would directly harm more than 850,000 Palestinians - essentially imprisoning over 263,000 in their communities, and cutting off tens of thousands from their farmland. At the year's end there were some indications that Israel was modifying the route to harm fewer Palestinians.

In 2003, Israel made unprecedented efforts to limit the access of foreign nationals to the Occupied Territories. Dozens of internationals have been arrested, deported, and denied entry into Israel and the Occupied Territories. These restrictions on movement and increased suspicion of foreigners have hindered the work of organizations that provide essential humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population.

During this year, and particularly following the war in Iraq, there were renewed efforts to advance the diplomatic process on the basis of the Quartet's Road Map. This initiative brought hope for improvement in the human rights situation, but also a great deal of skepticism. While the Road Map includes human rights elements, it does not recognize them as legal obligations that must be met regardless of political circumstances. This approach raises fear that the mistakes that doomed the Oslo Process will be repeated.

In 2003, the Israeli public paid little attention to human rights issues, focusing instead on issues including national elections and the war in Iraq. Furthermore, the grave human rights violations that once captured headlines have now become part of the routine to which Israelis are accustomed, and the public and media have become increasingly apathetic to such incidents.

The primary goals of B'Tselem remain to protect human rights in the Occupied Territories and to generate commitment among the Israeli public to human rights principles. The strategies to achieve these goals are the following:

- To provide information to the Israeli public and the international community about human rights violations in the Occupied Territories;
- To recommend and encourage policy changes to ensure greater protection of human rights;
- To foster debate and discussion among the Israeli public regarding human rights norms and specific policies in the Occupied Territories.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

B'Tselem released six new reports in 2003. The publications were produced in Hebrew and English and distributed to the more than 8,000 individuals and organizations on B'Tselem's mailing list including government and military officials, academics, diplomats, non-governmental organizations, journalists, and interested individuals. Electronic versions of the reports and Arabic summaries are available on B'Tselem's web site.

Separation Barrier

Throughout 2003, B'Tselem devoted substantial attention to the Separation Barrier under construction by Israel and served as the primary source of information for the press and policymakers on this topic.

Throughout the year, B'Tselem monitored government and military decisions relating to the Barrier, including the route in newly approved sections and the permit system to cross the Barrier, the functioning of passage points in locations where the Barrier is operational, and the impact of the barrier on the human rights of Palestinians living in proximity. B'Tselem regularly produced updated maps, statistics and analysis, all of which were made available in printed format and on the organization's web site.

B'Tselem also conducted extensive public education and advocacy work on the Separation Barrier, focusing on raising awareness of the particular route that has been chosen for the Barrier, and highlighting the resulting humanitarian impact on the Palestinian population.

A powerpoint presentation on the Barrier was prepared with maps, pictures and statistics and served as the basis for briefings and lectures. B'Tselem provided group and individual briefings on the Barrier for Members of Knesset, the diplomatic community in Israel, visiting foreign policymakers, human rights lawyers and representatives from Israeli NGOs addressing issues ranging from human rights to the environment. B'Tselem's briefings galvanized other Israeli organizations to take action on the barrier including submission of legal challenges and grassroots activism. B'Tselem escorted policymakers and Jewish communal leaders from abroad, to see the Barrier and meet with Palestinians affected by it. In addition, B'Tselem staff members participated in public events throughout Israel to educate the public on the Separation Barrier and its impact on the Palestinian civilian population.

B'Tselem provided information and tours of the Barrier for dozens of journalists and documentary filmmakers. B'Tselem issued four press releases on this topic, and the Barrier was a primary component of the press tour held to announce the release of the report on the village of Nu'man as described below. B'Tselem's work with the press on the Separation Barrier resulted in a major article in the weekend supplement of *Yediot Ahronot*, as well as articles in the Guardian, the Toronto Star, the Independent, the Boston Globe, BBC, Washington Post, and National Public Radio, among others.

B'Tselem participated in bi-weekly sessions organized by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on the topic of the Separation Barrier. This forum provided a framework for sharing ideas and resources with UN bodies, international humanitarian organizations, and NGOs.

In October, B'Tselem sent two staff members to Washington DC in order to provide briefings on this topic to policymakers, think-tanks, NGOs, and the press. B'Tselem obtained several high level meetings and received very positive feedback on our materials. The briefings clearly generated discussion and offered a new perspective, particularly for members of Congress.

The Road Map

In June, B'Tselem published a briefing paper providing monitoring recommendations for the provisions of the Road Map as relate to human rights, including the issues of attacks on civilians, house demolitions, restrictions on movement, the settlement freeze, and the Separation Barrier. The document was sent to members of the Quartet together with a letter emphasizing the importance of including human rights as an integral part of the diplomatic process. B'Tselem received very positive feedback from diplomats and politicians in response to this document.

Status Reports

This year, B'Tselem initiated a new series of reports that focus on a particular town or village, illuminating the problems unique to that location and putting them in the context of Israel's broader policies in the Occupied Territories. B'Tselem produced status reports on the Al-Mawasi area in Gaza, the H2 area in Hebron, and the village of Nu'man in East Jerusalem.

Al-Mawasi: Impossible Life in an Isolated Enclave

The al-Mawasi area is an isolated enclave near the Gush Qatif settlements in the Gaza Strip. The extreme restrictions on movement imposed by the IDF have effectively imprisoned residents in this community, making earning a living, receiving medical treatment, and obtaining an education virtually impossible. In March, B'Tselem issued a report describing the difficult conditions in which Al-Mawasi's residents live.

Hebron Area H-2: Settlements Cause Mass Departure of Palestinians

In August, B'Tselem issued a report on the living conditions of the 35,000 Palestinian residents of the H-2 area in Hebron which is under complete Israeli control due to the 500 settlers living there. As a result of the repeated abuse by settlers and security forces in the city, the prolonged curfew, and the closing of Palestinian shops and businesses, Palestinian families who can afford to do so have left the area. B'Tselem's report called on the government to remove the settlers from H-2, as their presence inherently results in human rights violations. This report received coverage by *Reshet Bet* radio, *Ha'aretz*, Ma'ariv online, and Reuters.

Nu'man, East Jerusalem: Life under the Threat of Expulsion

The two hundred residents of the village of Nu'man hold West Bank identity cards even though they live within the borders of the Jerusalem Municipality. Their situation is Kafkaesque: Israel considers them to be illegally in Israel when there are in their own homes – in the village in which they were born. The IDF has blocked off the road connecting them to the rest of Jerusalem, and the Separation Barrier will block off the road to the West Bank – their only remaining road. Thus, even if the residents manage to contest the demolition orders that have been issued for a number of the houses in the village, the construction of the Barrier will leave them isolated and with little choice but to leave.

In September, B'Tselem published a report on the village of Nu'man, and held a press tour in the village. At the press tour, which was attended by over forty journalists, B'Tselem presented previously unseen aerial photographs taken of the village prior to and following 1967. These photographs prove that the village was established before Israel occupied the area, contrary to official Israeli claims. The press tour also provided an opportunity for journalists to meet the village residents and see where the Separation Barrier is to be built. Following the press tour, articles appeared in the Jerusalem Post, Agence France Presse, and the Guardian, among others.

Medical Personnel Harmed

In December, B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights released a joint report addressing the extensive delays and frequent humiliation faced by medical personnel in the West Bank. The report, entitled ***Medical Personnel Harmed***, also documents cases in which medical personnel have been beaten, and several extreme cases in which soldiers used ambulances for military purposes. These difficulties have had a dramatic impact on the ability of Palestinians to obtain proper medical care, and emergency treatment in particular. The report argues that there can be no effective system for emergency medicine with all of the physical roadblocks and checkpoints that are currently in place. The report, which was released in the framework of B'Tselem's campaign on movement described below, received extensive coverage in the Israeli press including *Voice of Israel* radio, and all the major internet news sites.



“50% of the babies are not born in hospitals” (December 2003)

B'Tselem banner on the YNET news website announcing release of Medical Personnel Harmed

RESOURCE AND INFORMATION CENTER

B'Tselem continued to serve as the leading source of information about human rights in the Occupied Territories for researchers, diplomats, and the Israeli and international public. Four data coordinators monitored the daily press, government statements, and other sources of information and compiled comprehensive statistics on a wide range of human rights issues.

B'Tselem has continued to upgrade its database of human rights violations, facilitating easier access to information. In addition to making this database available to the public, B'Tselem responded to dozens of information requests each month via post and electronic mail. In 2003, B'Tselem created a digital photo archive in order to accommodate the dramatic increase in still and video footage collected by the organization and to make these materials more

accessible. The photo archive is available to the public and has been used by journalists, artists, and human rights activists.

B'Tselem's trilingual website continues to provide real-time information and access to analysis, statistics and publications on a wide range of subjects in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. An expanded feature of the website is the highlighting of individual stories of human rights violations, providing full testimonies of victims and eyewitnesses. The site now receives more than 1,500 visitors per day.

During B'Tselem's campaign on Israel's siege policy, a special section of the site was developed on this topic, which contained extensive resource materials including testimonies, quotes from soldiers and security officials, statistics, and a map of the checkpoints and roadblocks within the West Bank. Internet banners placed on the major Israeli news sites contained links to this site, as did all printed materials published as part of the campaign. In December alone, over 10,000 visitors reached this site through these banners.

B'Tselem has continued to expand its electronic mailing list, with more than 6,000 subscribers now receiving the email newsletters that provide statistics, updates on recent developments, and stories on the impact of Israel's policies on individual Palestinians.

B'Tselem regularly updated the diplomatic community in Israel on human rights developments in the Occupied Territories, focusing particularly on the Separation Barrier and other human rights developments as they relate to the diplomatic process. B'Tselem also gave presentations to visiting foreign policymakers and delegations from around the world, and staff members participated in several international conferences, sharing their knowledge about human rights issues in the Occupied Territories.

Media Work

B'Tselem's research and documentation are a primary source of information for media correspondents. B'Tselem issued eighteen press releases in Hebrew, English, and Arabic to over 800 local and foreign journalists to announce the release of new reports and issue statements on current events. B'Tselem fieldworkers regularly accompanied journalists to collect information for feature stories on a variety of subjects, and staff members were frequently interviewed for up-to-date information and analysis on human rights issues. As described above, B'Tselem also escorted journalists to tour the Separation Barrier and meet Palestinians affected by it, and held a press tour to accompany the release of the status report on the village of Nu'man . In addition, journalists were invited to accompany B'Tselem's checkpoint monitoring team to visit checkpoints throughout the West Bank. As a result of these efforts, B'Tselem received extensive media coverage by the local and foreign press, with hundreds of articles appearing in 2003, particularly regarding the Separation Barrier, checkpoints, and violence by members of the security forces.

ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

In addition to advocacy on the topics addressed in B'Tselem reports as described above, B'Tselem also engaged in advocacy regarding topics including freedom of movement, military accountability, family unification, and security force violence. The Israeli public and policymakers are the primary targets for B'Tselem's advocacy and education work, which aims to engage the public in dialogue, mobilize advocates for human rights, and ultimately change attitudes. B'Tselem also engages in international advocacy in order to mobilize the international community to speak out on human rights issues in the Occupied Territories.

Freedom of Movement

In 2003, B'Tselem launched its project to deploy Israeli monitors to IDF checkpoints and carried out a major public education campaign on Israel's siege policy. In May, B'Tselem's checkpoint team began its regular monitoring presence, and started recruiting Israeli volunteers to participate in the project. In July, a training workshop was conducted for a group of twenty volunteers, who then joined the team on a regular basis.

The monitoring team has been able to gather information and document violations in areas that have been otherwise inaccessible to B'Tselem. In particular, the monitoring team has facilitated the collection of video and still footage that have been used in B'Tselem's materials, and made publicly available. Reports from Palestinians and international volunteers indicate that the presence of B'Tselem's monitors has an impact on soldiers' behavior and has reduced human rights violations at the checkpoints. The monitoring team also intervened in cases where they witnessed problems such as Palestinians being held for long periods of time or having their belongings confiscated. In addition to speaking directly with the soldiers at the checkpoint, the monitors regularly contact the hotline established by HaMoked, which is in touch with Civil Administration and military sources who are supposed to provide real-time solutions for problems that arise at checkpoints. In some cases, though not all, B'Tselem's intervention was successful. In addition, the monitors were also able to refer people to other organizations including HaMoked and Physicians for Human Rights, to help them address non-urgent issues. The extensive presence of B'Tselem staff in the field has also offered an opportunity to increase awareness of B'Tselem among both Palestinians and Israeli security forces.

An incident from the Sarra checkpoint outside Nablus highlights the importance of the team's ability to reach remote checkpoints, to intervene in real time, and to bring stories of the reality in the Occupied Territories to the public's attention. At the end of December, B'Tselem's checkpoint monitors encountered a man who had just been beaten at the Sarra checkpoint. Further investigation indicated that this was not an isolated incident, but that soldiers were abusing Palestinians regularly at this checkpoint. B'Tselem quickly issued a case study of these incidents (in January 2004). As a result of B'Tselem's intervention, the soldiers were removed from the checkpoint, and the Military Police opened an investigation into these cases.

Campaign on Israel's Siege Policy

In December, B'Tselem launched a major campaign on Israel's siege policy. The campaign, which ran through February, aimed to raise awareness among the Israeli public and policymakers about the devastating effects of the checkpoints and other obstacles restricting movement inside the West Bank.

The campaign included paid advertisements, internet banners, distribution of a newspaper insert to 550,000 households, extensive work with the local press, and an expanded website. B'Tselem volunteers distributed materials published as part of the campaign at information booths on university campuses and city centers in more than ten locations across the country. B'Tselem also invited Members of Knesset, academics, and former security officials, to tour the checkpoints with us to form a firsthand impression. The campaign generated widespread media attention and resulted in several positive initiatives by policymakers.



Siege policy – 1st means of punishment.
Piles of dirt: Prevent passage of vehicles. Make passage very difficult for the sick and elderly. Located along the main roads. Block of access to villages. Within the West Bank there are 457 dirt roadblocks. This isn't security. Its humiliation.
(December 2003)

The campaign continued into early 2004 with production of a pocket guide for soldiers staffing checkpoints, banners along major Israeli roadways, and a music video with popular Israeli artists.

This campaign was far more extensive than any previous B'Tselem public campaign and reached a far wider audience. While it is still too early to make a full assessment of the project's impact, there is no doubt that it has drawn substantial attention and fostered public debate. B'Tselem has received hundreds of responses from Israelis across the political spectrum and the siege section of our website has received thousands of visitors. Hundreds of people have requested to be added to B'Tselem's mailing lists, and more than a hundred have expressed interest in volunteering. Of course, we have received many negative responses to the campaign as well, though in many cases people who call to criticize our work finish the conversation by requesting additional materials.

During the campaign, we witnessed a dramatic increase in the Israeli press' coverage of B'Tselem and the topic of checkpoints in general. Two encouraging signs of the potential for this to make a real impact on policy is the recent establishment of a "Checkpoint Watch" group of twenty Members of Knesset, including several representatives from the Labor and Shinui parties, and an IDF committee set up to investigate this functioning of checkpoints and make recommendations for improvements.

Security Force Violence

Throughout 2003, B'Tselem received many reports of violence by security force members toward Palestinian civilians. A particularly severe incident of violence occurred on December 30, 2002. According to testimonies taken by B'Tselem, a Border Police jeep stopped alongside 'Imran Abu Hamdia, who was standing with friends outside his home in Hebron. The policemen pulled Abu Hamdia into the jeep and drove off. About forty minutes later, Hamdia's friends found his body lying in the industrial zone, alongside the road.

B'Tselem and Al-Haq obtained the consent of Abu Hamdia's family to conduct an autopsy, and arranged for the participation of a Danish pathologist, Dr. Jorgen Tomassen. The autopsy indicated that Abu Hamdia died as a result of a severe beating. B'Tselem's investigations also revealed that there had been a series of other incidents carried out by Border Policemen in Hebron that same evening.

As a result of pressure from B'Tselem, the Department for Police Investigations (DIP) opened an investigation into the incidents of December 30, and B'Tselem assisted the DIP in gaining access to the Palestinian witnesses and members of the bereaved family. In April 2003, indictments were issued against four Border Police officers involved in this abuse, and the trial is currently in progress. The arrests and indictments of the Border Police officers received extensive coverage in the Israeli media, including a major article in the weekend supplement of *Yediot Ahronot*, the largest-circulation Israeli newspaper, a lead editorial in *Ha'aretz*, and a story on the Friday night *Yoman* news program on TV Channel 1, which included testimonies from Abu Hamdia's family members as well as the perpetrators. The combination of the *Yediot* feature and the story on *Yoman*, both of which credited B'Tselem, is the most extensive Israeli media attention given to a human rights story in recent history. This topic also received coverage in the foreign press including Reuters, the Associated Press, and Agence France Press.

Additional information provided by B'Tselem and continued investigations by the DIP led to indictments issued against eleven more police officers from the same unit, as well as a decision to disband the unit. As a result of the wave of public attention to this topic, the

Knesset's Law Committee held a series of discussions on security force violence and invited B'Tselem to testify on four occasions.

In highlighting these and other cases of violent abuse by the security forces, B'Tselem strove to draw attention to the fact that these are not merely isolated incidents carried out by a few "rotten apples," but rather indicate a wider phenomenon which has yet to be given sufficient attention by the government or military.

Military Accountability

In contrast with IDF policy prior to the current Intifada, investigations into the use of lethal force against Palestinian civilians are now opened only in exceptional cases. In total, only 70 investigations have been opened into such incidents despite the fact that over 2,300 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces, including at least 1,100 unarmed civilians. By refraining from conducting investigations, the military sends a message to soldiers that they can harm Palestinians with impunity. In early 2003, B'Tselem met with the Military Judge Advocate General, Colonel Menachem Finkelstein, to discuss this policy. B'Tselem also raised this topic in two sessions in which Finkelstein appeared before the Knesset Law Committee.

In October, B'Tselem submitted a petition to the High Court together with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel challenging the military's policy on opening investigations. The Court held a hearing on this petition in December and required the State to supply additional information to justify its policy. The petition and discussions on this topic in the Knesset Law Committee generated press coverage, including articles in *Ha'aretz*, Ynet, the Associated Press, the International Herald Tribune.

B'Tselem worked with the Military Investigation Unit and the Department for the Investigation of Police to encourage them to open investigations into incidents documented by B'Tselem, and facilitate the investigations that they are conducting. B'Tselem provided the units with the information that the organization has obtained regarding over one hundred incidents in which there may have been wrongdoing or negligence by members of the security forces. Upon request, B'Tselem has also assisted the units in locating and gaining access to victims and eye-witnesses of these incidents. Palestinians are frequently suspicious of cooperation with Israeli institutions and pessimistic that anything will result from it, thus B'Tselem's efforts to persuade Palestinians to testify is essential to ensure that investigations are conducted. The case of Abu Hamdia described above is one example of B'Tselem's successes in ensuring accountability of security force members.

Family Unification

In July, the Knesset passed a law under which citizenship or residency status will no longer be granted to Palestinians from the Occupied Territories who marry Israelis. This law harms thousands of people, including couples that seek to be married, as well as those who have been married for years and are waiting for approval of their application for family unification. Some of the children of Jerusalemites who were born in the Occupied Territories, will not be able to legally live in Israel with their parents and siblings. The drafters of the bill manipulatively cited security arguments to justify a blatantly racist proposal that is really intended to limit the Palestinian population inside Israel



*Under the proposed legislation:
If you marry a Palestinian, you will
have to leave Israel.
Members of the Internal Affairs
Committee - Don't pass this racist law.
(June 2003)*

In the months that the Knesset was discussing this bill, B'Tselem conducted advocacy to prevent its passage. A press release entitled "Enshrining Racism in Law" was issued following the passage of the first reading of the law in June, and received coverage on the major Israeli news web sites. Articles were also published on this topic in the Guardian, the Independent, the Associated Press, and the Boston Globe.

B'Tselem distributed an information packet on the bill to members of the diplomatic community, providing them with the text of the bill as well as analysis from a human rights perspective. B'Tselem contacted MKs and placed an ad in *Ha'aretz* prior to the committee's vote on whether to send the bill back to the Knesset plenum. B'Tselem also met with the legal advisor of the Internal Affairs Committee together with representatives from other human rights organizations.

The climate in Israel and the security arguments used to justify the law made advocacy on this topic extremely difficult. Despite the efforts of B'Tselem and other human rights organizations, the law passed as a one-year temporary measure. As a result of the organizations' efforts, several changes were introduced to the bill that will to some degree minimize its harm, such as the inclusion of a mechanism for granting permits for young children. B'Tselem wrote a report on this topic together with HaMoked, which was issued in early 2004.

Advocacy with Israeli Policymakers

As described above, B'Tselem has engaged in advocacy with Members of Knesset on issues including the Separation Barrier and legislation to prevent family reunification. B'Tselem provided its reports and regular fax briefings to all Members of Knesset with updates on the human rights situation in the Occupied Territories. Staff members also met with military and government officials including Military Judge Advocate General, Colonel Menachem Finkelstein, the staff of IDF spokesperson's office, and Foreign Ministry staff who deal with human rights issues. In addition, B'Tselem testified on the issue of violence by members of the security forces on four occasions in the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, and participated in meetings of a new Knesset subcommittee dealing with human rights and humanitarian organizations. As described above, B'Tselem's work on the checkpoints also provided the initial impetus for the establishment of a committee of MKs to address this topic, and B'Tselem worked closely with them, providing background information, analysis, and tours of the checkpoints.

Outreach to Jewish Communities

Throughout 2003 B'Tselem continued its outreach efforts to the Diaspora Jewish community, focusing on the Reform rabbinate and Jewish communal leaders visiting in Israel. Together with Rabbis for Human Rights, B'Tselem hosted study tours for rabbis, rabbinic students and Jewish communal leaders. In addition, B'Tselem produced a brochure in English particularly focused at a Jewish audience. The brochure was distributed to participants in conferences held in Jerusalem, and sent to all the rabbis and Jewish organizations on B'Tselem's mailing list.

Presentations

B'Tselem staff continued to provide lectures to Israeli audiences in various forums, educating the public about human rights in the Occupied Territories and fostering engagement with human rights issues. In addition, B'Tselem gave presentations to groups from the security forces, which were attended by hundreds of soldiers and Border Police officers.

Volunteer Activism

B'Tselem continues to foster engagement by the Israeli public in human rights issues and mobilize activists to speak out on these topics. Volunteers are an integral part of B'Tselem's checkpoint monitoring team, and played an essential role in distributing information during B'Tselem's campaign on movement.

Building Organizational Capacity

B'Tselem shares its professional expertise with other groups on a regular basis in order to help develop capacity for human rights monitoring and advocacy. In 2003, staff people from other Israeli organizations have joined B'Tselem's checkpoint monitoring team in order to go out into the field, which is otherwise difficult. B'Tselem has also assisted other organizations in building and strengthening their fieldwork, and provided background and training for individuals who have come through international civil society organizations to serve as observers in the Occupied Territories.