

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

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

# B'Tselem 2004 Activity Report

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout 2004, we saw a continuation of the grave human rights violations in the Occupied Territories that characterize the past four years. Severe restrictions on movement continue to impact every aspect of daily life for the entire Palestinian population and devastate the Palestinian economy.

Israel not only continued its policy of assassinations in the Gaza Strip, but expanded its targets to high-level leaders including Hamas leaders Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdul Aziz Rantisi. Israeli incursions into Palestinian population centers persisted, with extensive operations carried out during the course of the year in Rafah and Jabalya in the Gaza Strip.

Massive house demolitions were carried out by the IDF on the basis of alleged military need, with a total of 1,357 houses demolished in 2004, the vast majority of which were situated in the Gaza Strip. In addition, Israel continues to demolish homes of the families of Palestinians suspected of attacks against Israeli civilians or security forces. 181 such punitive demolitions were carried out in 2004.

The Separation Barrier attracted substantial public attention, particularly surrounding two important legal developments. The Israeli High Court voided thirty kilometers of the route of the Barrier northwest of Jerusalem, ruling that it disproportionately harmed Palestinians living in proximity. Ten days later, the International Court of Justice ruled that the construction of the Barrier within the West Bank is in violation of international law.

In addition to the Separation Barrier ruling, we witnessed a number of other important developments within the legal sphere. Attorney General Menachem Mazuz refused to legally sanction widespread demolitions proposed by the IDF in order to widen the "Philadelphi Route" along the border between Gaza and Egypt. In addition, a legal team appointed by Mazuz recommended that Israel formally apply the Fourth Geneva Convention, thus officially acknowledging the situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to be one of occupation.

Public attention throughout the year focused extensively on the Disengagement Plan, originally put forward by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in December 2003. Discussion on this topic dealt almost exclusively with the political and security aspects of such a plan while ignoring the human rights elements. Towards the end of the year, we witnessed a number of incidents of abuse and killing of civilians which resulted in extensive public discussion and debate regarding military accountability and the morality of the IDF. The death of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat at the year's end brought about a dramatic shift in discourse, and



Palestinians with Israeli IDs and those with West Bank IDs are quite common. ***Forbidden Families: Family Unification and Child Registration in East Jerusalem*** describes the impossible situation in which thousands of families live. Couples who had not yet obtained permanent status for a spouse from the Occupied Territories as of May 2002 when Israel froze requests for unification, and those who have married since, cannot live together legally. The report also challenges the security arguments that have been cited to support the law, arguing that security is once again being used to disguise other racist and illegal motivations that would not withstand judicial review.

Throughout the year, B'Tselem continued to act as part of a multi-organization coalition working against the Citizenship law. In July, the organizations published an advertisement in *Ha'aretz* and lobbied Knesset members prior to the Knesset vote on extending the law. As a result of the pressure, the government extended the law for only six months rather than a year, and established a committee to redraft the law so as to reinstate family unification in cases in which there is a "low security risk."

### ***Separation Barrier***

Since the initial approval of the Separation Barrier by the Israeli government in 2002, B'Tselem has served as a primary resource regarding all aspects of the Barrier for the public, policymakers and the media. In 2004, B'Tselem produced two reports on this topic. In addition, B'Tselem regularly produced updated maps, statistics and analysis, all of which were made available in printed format and on the organization's website, and remain in constant demand. B'Tselem continued to escort journalists, documentary filmmakers, and other groups to see the Separation Barrier and meet those affected by it. In addition, B'Tselem's Director, Jessica Montell, published opinion pieces regarding the Barrier in the *Jerusalem Post*, *Ma'ariv* On-line, the *Baltimore Sun*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

B'Tselem has worked closely with other Israeli organizations addressing the Separation Barrier to assist in their efforts. In particular, B'Tselem has cooperated with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and HaMoked, updating them on developments regarding the Barrier and alerting them to problems that can be addressed through their legal advocacy. B'Tselem's maps, statistics and reports have served as an essential resource for these organizations in preparing their court petitions. B'Tselem also participates in a forum coordinated by Shatil, through which Israeli organizations consult on a regular basis to coordinate work on the Barrier and formulate strategy.

In July, the International Court of Justice ruled that the construction of the Barrier within the West Bank is in violation of international law. The advisory opinion spawned substantial public discussion within Israel, particularly regarding the possibility of sanctions. Ten days before the ICJ decision, the Israeli High Court of Justice voided thirty kilometers of the route of the Barrier northwest of Jerusalem. In this precedent-setting decision, the justices held that the planned route disproportionately harmed Palestinians living in proximity. Following this decision, Israel halted construction in most locations and is now revising the entire route.

The reevaluation of the route was clearly the fruit of the cumulative efforts of B'Tselem and all the other organizations who documented the facts, pursued legal advocacy, and generated public attention to the disastrous implications of the Separation Barrier. The updated route of the Barrier has not yet been officially presented or approved, but media reports indicate that there will be some substantial improvements. Some sections of the revised route will run close to or along the Green Line, most notably along the south of the West Bank. In addition, the secondary barriers will be eliminated, and the Eastern Barrier that was proposed though not approved by the government, has been cancelled. Yet the route remains far from perfect.

Most pressingly, there is no change to the devastating route of the Barrier in East Jerusalem where construction continues, and several major settlement blocs including Ariel, Ma'ale Adumim, and Gush Etzion are slated to remain to the west of the Barrier. Here B'Tselem remains especially active, both in conducting research and carrying out public education.

### **Facing the Abyss: The Isolation of Sheikh Sa'ad Village**

In February, B'Tselem released a report addressing the isolation of the Sheikh Sa'ad village from Jerusalem and the West Bank, and the hardship awaiting its two thousand residents if the Separation Barrier is completed along the planned route. Sheikh Sa'ad is part of the contiguous urban area of East Jerusalem. In September 2002, the IDF blocked the only road leading out of the village with piles of dirt and concrete blocks. Since then, entry and exit by vehicle has been impossible. Residents without Jerusalem identity cards who want to leave the village on foot must have a permit. However, the Civil Administration denies most requests for permits, forcing residents to remain confined to the village or risk harassment by the Border Police for entering Jerusalem illegally. Since the roadblock was set up, about a quarter of the residents have moved from their homes in the village. If construction of the Separation Barrier continues as planned, the Barrier will completely block access to the village and turn Sheikh Sa'ad into an enclave, forcing residents to choose between living as prisoners in their village or leaving their homes.

B'Tselem's report on Sheikh Sa'ad, entitled *Facing the Abyss*, was released during the opening hearing of the ICJ on the Barrier in hopes of drawing press attention and highlighting a particular example of a location in which the route of the Barrier is problematic. B'Tselem escorted a number of journalists to visit the village and meet with residents, resulting in press coverage by Army Radio and the Voice of Israel, among others.

### **Not All it Seems: Preventing Access to Land in the Tulkarm-Qalqiliya Area**

In June, B'Tselem released *Not All it Seems*, which describes life for farmers in the Tulkarm-Qalqiliya area following construction of the Separation Barrier. The military has declared the enclaves created between the Barrier and the Green Line (the 1967 border) a closed military zone. While Israelis and foreigners are free to enter this area unrestricted, Palestinians wanting to farm their land west of the Barrier face a bureaucratic nightmare to obtain a special permit issued by the Civil Administration. The report revealed that the Civil Administration rejects about twenty-five percent of the permit requests in the Tulkarm-Qalqiliya area, denying these applicants their right to earn a living from farming. Even after obtaining permits, farmers face further difficulties in crossing the Barrier as the agricultural gates through which they must pass are open only for short periods of time, and passage often requires long waits.

### ***Forbidden Roads***

In August, B'Tselem published a report entitled *Forbidden Roads: The Discriminatory West Bank Road Regime*, which examines Israel's prohibitions on Palestinian vehicles from using certain roads. The report includes a new map – the first of its kind – indicating the roads in the West Bank on which Palestinian vehicles are forbidden or restricted. B'Tselem's research revealed that Palestinian travel is restricted or entirely prohibited on forty-one roads and sections of roads throughout the West Bank, including many of the main traffic arteries, for a total of over seven hundred kilometers of roadway. As a result, Palestinians must use long, winding alternate roads that pass through densely populated urban areas, or run-down dirt roads that go through the mountains.

*Forbidden Roads* received extensive coverage in the Israeli press, with stories appearing on all the major news websites, as well as the evening news of TV channels 1 and 10. To draw attention to the report, B'Tselem placed a banner on Y-net, *Yediot Ahronot's* website, through which over 7,500 people reached B'Tselem's website. The map from the report showing roads on which Palestinian travel is restricted, was downloaded over 10,000 times from B'Tselem's website. The map also served as an essential resource for the international donor consortium to the Palestinian Authority in evaluating Israel's request for funding to construct a separate road network for Palestinians, which was denied.



*B'Tselem Report - No Entry for Arabs  
(Internet Banner: August 2004)*

### **House Demolitions**

In November, B'Tselem issued a comprehensive report on Israel's policy of punitive house demolitions entitled *Through No Fault of Their Own*. The report revealed that the IDF has demolished twice as many homes for the purpose of punishment as the figure claimed by Israeli officials, with a total of 628 homes, in which 3,983 people lived, demolished since the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada. The report emphasized that while punitive demolitions are ostensibly aimed at Palestinians suspected of involvement in attacks against Israelis, in practice, the primary victims are family members who are not suspected of any wrongdoing and those living in houses near those targeted for demolition. B'Tselem's statistics indicate that for each of the 333 Palestinians whose actions prompted the demolitions another twelve innocent Palestinians lost their homes.

To coincide with the release of this report, B'Tselem produced a short video on home demolitions, in Hebrew and English, focusing particularly on children as victims of Israel's demolition policy. Internet banners placed on Israeli news websites, included a link to the video, which was also aired in fifteen movie theaters across Israel. One theater chain stopped screening the video, claiming that moviegoers had complained. The censorship of the video drew substantial press attention, and spawned a boycott of the chain. Over 30,000 people viewed the video on B'Tselem's website, and B'Tselem received a huge wave of public responses on this topic. At the end of the year, the Knesset Law Committee convened a special session on the basis of the report, to which B'Tselem was invited to testify. IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon, announced the establishment of a special committee to evaluate the military's policy on house demolitions.



*This isn't security. Its revenge.  
Israel has demolished over 4,000 houses during this Intifada. More than 28,000 people have been left homeless.  
(Internet Banner: November 2004)*

## **RESOURCE AND INFORMATION CENTER**

B'Tselem continues to serve as the leading source of information about human rights in the Occupied Territories for researchers, diplomats, journalists, and the Israeli and international public. Four data coordinators compiled comprehensive statistics on a wide range of human

rights issues based on B'Tselem's research as well as government statements, press reports, and other sources of information.

B'Tselem has continued to upgrade its database of human rights violations and digital photo archive, facilitating easier access to information. B'Tselem is cataloging its resource library to enable use within the organization and by outside researchers. In addition to making these databases available to the public, B'Tselem responded to dozens of information requests each month via phone, post, and email. 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. B'Tselem has been working intensively to prepare its redesigned and updated website, which will be launched at the beginning of 2005.

At the beginning of 2004, B'Tselem initiated a new format of its email updates, based on the lessons learned during the year in which it was distributed in newspaper format. The new design is better adapted to viewing by email, and facilitates differential distribution based on language preferences. The list of subscribers to the mailing list continues to grow, with over 8,500 individuals now receiving the updates in English and 1,700 receiving the Hebrew version. Email updates now regularly include calls for action, providing individuals with avenues through which to speak out and act on the issues addressed.

B'Tselem's research and documentation are a primary source of information for media correspondents. In 2004, B'Tselem issued twenty-three press releases in Hebrew, English, and Arabic to over 200 local and 1,000 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, and staff members were frequently interviewed for up-to-date information and analysis on human rights issues. Journalists were invited to accompany B'Tselem's checkpoint monitoring team to visit checkpoints throughout the West Bank and the Separation Barrier. As a result of these efforts, B'Tselem received extensive media coverage by the local and foreign press, with hundreds of articles appearing in 2004, particularly regarding the Separation Barrier, checkpoints, military accountability, and house demolitions in Rafah.

In the past several months, B'Tselem has succeeded in increasing television coverage of its activities and human rights issues. Major stories have been aired on the evening news of the three main Israeli TV stations, including pieces on the Separation Barrier, the lack of access to water, confiscation of Palestinian vehicles, and hardships faced by residents of villages that straddle East Jerusalem and the West Bank such as Wallaje and Anata.

B'Tselem regularly updated the diplomatic community in Israel on human rights developments in the Occupied Territories, focusing particularly on the Separation Barrier, legislation preventing family unification, and house demolitions. B'Tselem also gave presentations to visiting foreign policymakers and delegations from around the world, and staff members participated in several international conferences and human rights networks, sharing their knowledge about human rights issues in the Occupied Territories.

## **ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS**

In addition to advocacy on the topics addressed in B'Tselem reports as described above, B'Tselem also engaged in advocacy on topics including freedom of movement, protection of civilians during military incursions, military accountability, human shields, and protection of children. 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. In addition, B'Tselem 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 December 2003, B'Tselem launched a major public campaign on Israel's siege policy. The campaign, which ran through February 2004, aimed at raising awareness among the Israeli public and policymakers about the devastating effects of checkpoints and other obstacles which restrict movement inside the West Bank.

The campaign included extensive work with the local press, distribution of a newspaper insert to half a million households, an expanded website, and a series of twenty-five advertisements describing the means used to enforce the siege policy and critical quotes from security officials. B'Tselem also escorted leading public figures, including academics and former security officials to tour the checkpoints to form a firsthand impression of the reality in the field. Many of these tours motivated the participants into action and generated additional media attention.

In January, B'Tselem distributed a pocket-guide to soldiers staffing checkpoints in the West Bank. The guide included a personal appeal to soldiers from popular Israeli musician Yuval Banai, as well as relevant IDF rules of conduct for soldiers stationed at checkpoints.

Also in January, B'Tselem released a music video created especially for the campaign. "Eyes Wide Open" is a remake of a popular Israeli song, featuring well-known Israeli artists who donated their time to the project. The lyrics speak of the need to acknowledge the reality around us. The music video features footage taken at roadblocks and checkpoints within the West Bank and shows the daily reality of Israel's siege policy. The song was regularly played on various radio stations. The video was released several weeks later, and could be viewed online through B'Tselem's website. All of the major Israeli news websites put links to the video on their sites, and over 36,000 people viewed it on B'Tselem's site. The video was also aired on the Israeli music television station. The innovation of an NGO producing a music video, and the powerful visual materials in the video itself, drew substantial public and media attention.



*To get to class, you have to pass a checkpoint... Usually they detain us for several hours and then tell us to go back home. We've missed many classes as a result... (January 2004)*



#### ***B'Tselem: Eyes Wide Open***

*With Albert Amar, Dana Berger, Daniel Salomon, Yossi Polack, Dafna Armoni, Danny Litani, and Jeremy Kaplan. (Internet banner: January 2004)*

During the campaign, B'Tselem made extensive use of internet banners on major Israeli news websites, creating links to a page allowing people to join B'Tselem's mailing list, volunteer, submit comments or questions, or access B'Tselem's website on the siege policy. Some 200,000 Israelis viewed the banners each day. Of these, over 42,000 individuals clicked on the banners, and 22,000 people went on to visit the section of the site on the siege policy.

B'Tselem received hundreds of responses from Israelis across the political spectrum through the site. In addition to advertisements in newspapers and on the internet, B'Tselem also hung posters along major roadways around the country and on bulletin boards in city centers.

During the campaign, we witnessed a dramatic increase in Israeli press coverage of B'Tselem and the topic of checkpoints. In addition to the quantitative increase in the attention to this topic, the innovative tools used as part of this campaign generated coverage in publications that do not usually address human rights issues, such as the culture supplements of Israeli daily newspapers and TimeOut Tel Aviv.

B'Tselem's work on the checkpoints also provided the initial impetus for the establishment of a committee of twenty Knesset Members from five different parties to address this topic, and B'Tselem worked closely with them, providing background information, analysis, and tours of the checkpoints. In addition, an IDF committee was formed to investigate the functioning of checkpoints to which B'Tselem was asked to submit recommendations. The recommendations of the committee, released in March, were largely in line with the criticism expressed by B'Tselem on this topic.

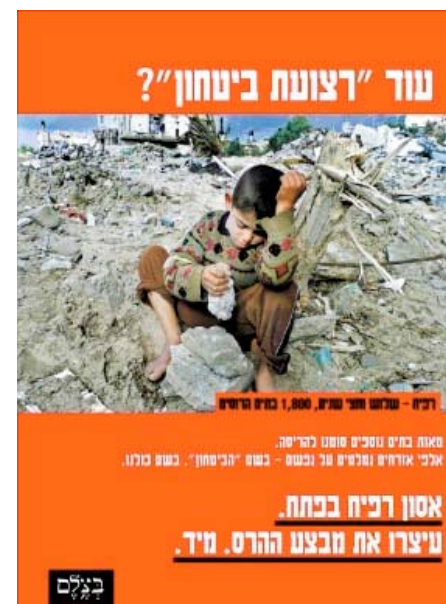
### ***IDF Operations in Gaza***

In May, the IDF began conducting extensive house demolitions in the Rafah refugee camp, and then undertook a massive military operation in the area. During this operation, B'Tselem was very active in providing information on the situation, issuing four press releases and three email updates containing statistics on the house demolitions as well as individual stories of Palestinians affected by IDF actions. B'Tselem's information on the demolitions was cited extensively by all the major Israeli news sources, as well as international sources such as the Associated Press and the Guardian, particularly as B'Tselem's figures contrasted sharply with those presented by the IDF.

During the operation, Attorney General Menachem Mazuz was asked to approve IDF plans to dramatically widen the Philadelphi Route along the Egyptian border which would have resulted in the demolition of hundreds more houses. B'Tselem placed two advertisements and an opinion piece on this topic in the *Ha'aretz* newspaper and called on activists to contact Mazuz, Justice Minister Yosef Lapid, and others to urge them to prevent this plan. B'Tselem's Director, Jessica Montell, also published an opinion piece in the Los Angeles Times against the house demolitions.

Following an outcry from within Israel and internationally against the widespread demolitions, Mazuz called on the IDF to prepare alternative plans that would cause less harm to the civilian population. During the same operation, B'Tselem joined a petition to the High Court demanding that the IDF take into account the needs of the civilian population. The Court issued a precedent setting ruling stating that that addressing civilian needs must be an integral part of planning for any military operation.

In October, the IDF conducted extensive incursions into the northern Gaza Strip. During this operation as well, B'Tselem mobilized to respond in real-time, providing assistance in individual cases of humanitarian suffering, releasing regular reports on fatalities, and working with the Israeli press to draw attention to the high percentage of civilian casualties, countering claims by Israeli officials that the operation targeted only militants.



*Another "Security Strip?"  
Hundreds of houses will be demolished  
and thousands of people left homeless.  
Stop the destruction. (May 2004)*



## ***Military Accountability***

B'Tselem continues to aggressively pursue accountability for members of the security forces who commit human rights violations. In recent months, B'Tselem succeeded in generating substantial media attention to the problem of violence by members of the security forces and facilitated official investigations into individual cases of abuse.

In one particularly severe incident documented by B'Tselem, Border Police officers beat two Palestinian workers, poured urine on them, and ordered them to jump from the second floor of a building. *Ma'ariv* newspaper did a major five-page article on this case, which included interviews with both the Palestinian victims as well as the Border Police officers. B'Tselem also uncovered incidents in which Israeli security forces bribed or stole from Palestinians. In one case, Border Police officers near Abu Dis, severely beat Ala a-Shalah, age 19, for several hours, and threatened to kill him after a check of his ID revealed that he had been arrested previously for entering Israel without a proper permit. The officers then called the a-Shalah's father and told him to bring 1,000 shekels or he would find his son in the hospital. After receiving B'Tselem's reports on these and other cases, the Knesset Law Committee agreed to hold a discussion on this topic.

In October 2004, Iman al-Hams, a twelve year-old girl, was shot and killed while walking to school in the Rafah refugee camp. The circumstances surrounding her death are grave, in particular the fact that the company commander "confirmed" her death which he claimed was in accordance with IDF regulations. B'Tselem worked to highlight that what was most unusual about the case was not the incident itself, but the fact that the IDF initiated a Military Police investigation into the incident that led to an indictment. There is no such accountability for the vast majority of Palestinian civilian deaths. While IDF soldiers have killed at least 1,656 Palestinians who took no part in hostilities, only 89 military police investigations have been conducted over the past four years into deaths and injuries of Palestinians. B'Tselem issued a press release on the lack of investigations, published two advertisements in the print edition of *Ha'aretz*, and placed a banner on the *Ha'aretz* website, which drew over 1,800 visitors. In addition to extensive coverage in the Israeli press, B'Tselem gave numerous interviews on this topic to international media outlets including the BBC, Associated Press, CBC, and CNN. B'Tselem also continued to pursue a petition to the High Court of Justice submitted in October 2003 together with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, to ensure that Military Police investigations are conducted into every killing of an unarmed Palestinian civilian.

In December, B'Tselem uncovered a case in which the organization's investigation indicated that the IDF executed an unarmed and injured Palestinian. The incident was the leading story on the Channel 10 TV evening news, Voice of Israel Radio, and in the *Yediot Ahronot* and *Ha'aretz* newspapers. The IDF appointed a special investigation team to look into the incident, and took the elite unit which stood accused out of operation while the case was under investigation. The investigation confirmed B'Tselem's findings although it did not recommend any legal action.

These incidents documented and publicized by B'Tselem played an essential role in generating extensive public discussion and debate regarding military accountability and the morality of the IDF toward the end of 2004. The relative calm within Israel and the cumulative effect of these cases and others handled by groups such as MachsomWatch, and *Shovrim Shtika*, seemed to succeed in breaking down the widely accepted belief among the Israeli public that human rights abuses are exceptional incidents rather than indicative of a wider phenomena. Even IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon expressed concern and said the army must engage in a process of self-evaluation.

B'Tselem has also continued its intensive work with the Military Investigation Unit and the Department for the Investigation of Police. B'Tselem's Data Coordinators regularly provide these bodies with information the organization has gathered regarding incidents in which there may have been wrongdoing or negligence by members of the security forces. Upon request, B'Tselem has assisted the units in locating and gaining access to the victims and eye-witnesses of these incidents. B'Tselem closely follows up on the cases submitted to the investigation units to try and ensure that they are not merely dismissed.

While B'Tselem's work on such cases has succeeded in drawing substantial public attention, as described above, such success does not always translate into individuals being tried or punished for their actions. Now equipped with statistics on this topic, and extensive experience regarding the many problems in the functioning of the military and police investigation units, such as the extended delays in their dealing with a case and their lack of Arabic speakers, B'Tselem plans to engage in significant advocacy work on this topic in 2005. Nonetheless, B'Tselem did have several substantial successes in 2004. The organization was instrumental in obtaining the first conviction in five years of a Border Police officer for abusing Palestinians and of a soldier on the charge of manslaughter.

**Human Shields**

In May 2002, a coalition of human rights organizations petitioned the High Court of Justice against the IDF's use of Palestinian civilians as human shields on the basis of B'Tselem's documentation of this phenomenon. Despite the State's commitment to forbid the use of "human shields," it argued that it had developed a new procedure by which Palestinian civilians are asked to direct other Palestinians to leave their house, which does not constitute using them as human shields.

B'Tselem has continued to gather testimonies on this topic, including the continuing use of human shields in violation of the IDF's commitment not to do so, as well as testimonies shedding light on the realities of the amended procedure put forward by the IDF. While the IDF insists that this new procedure is only used in cases in which Palestinians volunteer to help and when no danger will be posed to them, B'Tselem's testimonies reveal the coercion imposed on the Palestinian "volunteers" and the grave danger that such civilians face. The testimonies have been essential in the continued legal battle and served as the basis for a contempt of court request filed by the petitioners.

**Protection of Children**

A number of incidents occurred in 2004, in which children were involved in attempts to carry out attacks against Israelis. B'Tselem repeatedly condemned all attacks targeting civilians, and the use of children in such attacks in particular. B'Tselem issued a press release on this topic and did extensive work with the media emphasizing that children must be kept out of the cycle of violence.

**Advertisements and Internet Banners**

During 2004, B'Tselem placed print advertisements in the *Ha'aretz* newspaper and internet banners on various Israeli websites. B'Tselem initiated a regular banner on the *Ha'aretz* website, after this means proved particularly effective in B'Tselem's checkpoint campaign, which changes in response to ongoing events. Among other topics, these banners have addressed suicide attacks on Israeli civilians, the lack of an investigation



*Confirm the Investigation:  
The IDF must open a Military  
Police investigations into every  
killing of an unarmed civilian.  
(October 2004)*

into the killing of twelve year-old Iman al-Hams in Rafah (which was later opened), and summary statistics after four years of the intifada. In addition, banners have been placed on other major Israeli websites including *Yediot Ahronot* newspaper's site Y-Net, *Ma'ariv* newspaper's site NRG, and *Ha'aretz's* English website. The banners have served as an effective means to reach Israelis, and particularly a young audience, and expose them to B'Tselem's website and materials.

### ***Study Tours***

B'Tselem has increased its use of study tours in the West Bank to provide Israelis with a first-hand experience of the situation, raise their awareness of the grave implications of Israel's policy, and enable them to speak out on these issues. In addition to escorting individual journalists, policymakers and public figures in B'Tselem's jeep, two tours were held for the general public in honor of international Human Rights Day, and several tours for special groups including high-school students before their military service and Jewish communal leaders from abroad. The tours focused primarily on restrictions on movement and the Separation Barrier, but also touched on other human rights issues such as settlements, military accountability, and house demolitions. B'Tselem plans to continue expanding the use of study tours in 2005 as they have proven to have a significant impact on participants and succeeded in generating additional attention.

### ***Advocacy with Israeli Policymakers***

B'Tselem held a number of meetings with policymakers in order to gather information, discuss specific concerns and offer recommendations for changes in policy. Among others, B'Tselem met with the Assistant IDF Spokesperson, Orly Gal, and the new Head of the Civil Administration, Ilan Paz. As described above, B'Tselem worked extensively with Members of Knesset on the issue of freedom of movement, and with the army and police investigation units to ensure accountability for members of the security forces who commit wrongful acts.

In addition, B'Tselem was invited several times to appear before the Knesset Law Committee, including a session convened on the basis of B'Tselem's report on house demolitions, one in honor of human rights day, and two sessions on military accountability. The Committee's semiannual sessions on military accountability, at which the IDF Judge Advocate General provides a report, were initiated following a wave of public attention to this topic in 2003, largely stemming from several cases publicized by B'Tselem.

### ***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, exposing hundreds of soldiers and Border Police officers to B'Tselem's message.

### ***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. Throughout 2004, B'Tselem assisted other Israeli and Palestinian 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.

## **SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES AND HIGHLIGHTS**

In 2004, B'Tselem released six new publications addressing the Separation Barrier, family unification, punitive house demolitions, restrictions on movement, and security force violence. These publications were produced in both Hebrew and English and distributed to more than 10,000 individuals and organizations including government and military officials, academics, diplomats, NGO's, journalists, and interested individuals.

B'Tselem continued to be the primary information source on human rights in the Occupied Territories. B'Tselem regularly updated local policymakers and the diplomatic community on human rights developments in the Occupied Territories, and gave presentations to visiting foreign policymakers and delegations from around the world. B'Tselem's trilingual website and email newspaper continued to provide easily accessible information and updates. The site now receives more than 1,500 visitors per day, and the email newspaper has more than 8,500 subscribers. B'Tselem worked extensively with the media; issuing press releases, accompanying journalists into the field, and giving interviews, which resulted in hundreds of B'Tselem appearances in the local and foreign press on subjects such as the Separation Barrier, checkpoints, military accountability, and house demolitions in Rafah.

During the IDF operations in the Gaza Strip, B'Tselem played a crucial role in providing real-time information on the situation, particularly regarding the extent of house demolitions, and the high percentage of civilian casualties. Following an outcry from within Israel and abroad, plans for even more widespread demolitions were cancelled.

B'Tselem continued to serve as a primary resource regarding all aspects of the Separation Barrier for the public, policymakers and the media. In addition to publishing two reports on the topic, B'Tselem regularly produced updated maps, statistics and analysis, which were made available in printed format and on the organization's website, and remain in constant demand. B'Tselem escorted journalists, documentary filmmakers, diplomats, Jewish communal leaders, and other groups to see the Barrier and meet those affected by it. Information from B'Tselem also served as the basis of legal petitions submitted by other human rights organizations. The precedent-setting ruling of Israel's High Court in June 2004 was clearly the fruit of the efforts of B'Tselem and all the other organizations that documented the facts, pursued legal advocacy and generated public attention to the disastrous implications of the Separation Barrier. The ruling resulted in a freeze on construction while Israel reevaluates the entire route of the barrier. The updated route of the Barrier has not yet been officially presented or approved, but media reports indicate that there will be a number of substantial improvements.

B'Tselem's checkpoint monitoring team continued to travel to checkpoints around the West Bank on a regular basis, and escorted Members of Knesset, former security officials, and journalists. These tours, as well as group study tours organized by B'Tselem, enable participants to form a firsthand impression of the siege and speak out on this issue. The tours frequently generated additional media attention.

B'Tselem continued its major campaign on Israel's siege policy, which began in 2003, to raise awareness among the Israeli public and policymakers about the devastating effects of the checkpoints and roadblocks inside the West Bank. As part of the campaign, B'Tselem conducted extensive work with the media, placed internet banners on major Israeli news websites, and distributed a pocket-guide to soldiers staffing checkpoints. B'Tselem also released a music video entitled "Eyes Wide Open" featuring well-known Israeli artists and

footage taken at roadblocks and checkpoints within the West Bank. Over 36,000 people viewed the video on B'Tselem's website. B'Tselem's campaign generated hundreds of responses from Israelis across the political spectrum. The campaign also drew widespread media attention and resulted in several positive initiatives by policymakers, including the establishment of a Knesset "Checkpoint Watch" group, and an IDF committee to investigate the functioning of checkpoints.

To coincide with the release of a report on Israel's policy of punitive house demolitions, B'Tselem produced a short video focusing particularly on children as victims of Israel's demolition policy. Over 30,000 people viewed the video on B'Tselem's website, and thousands more saw it aired in movie theaters across Israel. The Knesset Law Committee convened a special session on the basis of the report, to which B'Tselem was invited to testify. IDF Chief of Staff, Moshe Ya'alon, announced the establishment of a special committee to evaluate the military's policy on house demolitions.

B'Tselem continued to aggressively pursue accountability for members of the security forces who commit human rights violations. This was a central message of B'Tselem's public education activities in 2004, including advertisements in the newspapers, extensive work with the press and several appearances before the Knesset Law Committee. B'Tselem's work on this topic succeeded in generating substantial media attention and fostering public debate on military accountability and the morality of the IDF. B'Tselem also continued advocacy regarding individual cases, sending dozens of cases to the investigation units asking that they open investigations into wrongdoing by soldiers or police officers. B'Tselem was instrumental in obtaining the first conviction in five years of a Border Police officer for abusing Palestinians and of a soldier on the charge of manslaughter.