



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

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

ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The political and security climate of 2006 dictated greater challenges for human rights organizations in Israel and the Occupied Territories, and especially in regard to the Gaza Strip. Elections in the Palestinian Authority, hailed initially for their democratic nature and then denounced both in Israel and internationally for having given Hamas a majority, brought in their wake increased violence in the form of intensified military operations and firing into Gaza, as well as an increase in the number of Qassam rockets fired from Gaza into the southern part of Israel. Donor funds withheld from the PA by the international community along with Israel's refusal to transfer tax revenues owed to the PA created an economic crisis that exacerbated the already severe level of poverty among Palestinians. The past year has also been marked by even greater constraints on movement within the West Bank, and high civilian fatality rates, particularly in Gaza.

Despite government efforts to deny responsibility, Israel continues to control the airspace and territorial waters of the Gaza Strip, movement between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the population registry, family unification, and the crossing of goods to and from Gaza. In addition to Israel's policy of targeted killing of Palestinian militants that has resulted in the killing of many civilian bystanders as well, Israel initiated wide-scale military operations in Gaza following the abduction of Cpl. Gilad Shalit on 26 June 2006, including bombing of civilian infrastructure and incursions into densely-populated areas. Israel has contributed to the severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza through the destruction of essential civilian infrastructure, the closure of crossings, and withholding of PA tax monies, all of which has devastated the health care and education systems and left 80% of Gazans living below the poverty line, 40% without work and 75% dependent on food aid.

In addition to the crisis in Gaza, the hostilities with Lebanon on Israel's northern border had a ripple effect in the form of a simultaneous increase in beatings and abuse of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories by Israel's soldiers and police. Israel also tightened restraints on movement in the West Bank, cementing the de facto division of the West Bank into five separate areas with travel between these areas difficult to impossible. The strangulation of movement meant even greater friction between security forces and the civilian population. The Separation Barrier and its implications also continued to occupy court dockets and government discussions. Construction continues, with close to 60% of the Barrier completed, as does the work of Palestinians and human rights organizations to advocate for changes in the route.

Despite the challenges presented by the political and security climate, B'Tselem still managed to provoke public attention and debate. Highlights of B'Tselem's major program accomplishments during the past year include:

- B'Tselem conducted a **major public campaign** to coincide with the December 2005 release of the report *Under the Guise of Security: Routing the Separation Barrier to Enable the Expansion of Israeli Settlements in the West Bank*.
- B'Tselem published a brochure on Jerusalem entitled *A Wall in Jerusalem: Obstacles to Human Rights in the Holy City* as part of a campaign that included tours and briefings.
- B'Tselem launched an initiative to focus public attention on **Israel's responsibilities in Gaza**, particularly regarding Israel's bombing of Gaza's electrical plant. B'Tselem's report, *Act of Vengeance*, was reinforced by 3 short films, Internet banners and advertising in the print media. Issues addressed included the high rate of civilian deaths from IDF fire and the severity of the humanitarian crisis.
- B'Tselem brought to the attention of the local and international media Israel's **de facto annexation of the Jordan Valley**, the eastern strip of the West Bank.
- B'Tselem generated widespread media attention, both domestic and local, to the substantial **increase in cases in which Israeli soldiers and Border Police in the West Bank beat, abuse, and humiliate Palestinians**, particularly evident following the outbreak of the war in Lebanon.
- B'Tselem focused official and public attention on **the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians affected by the freeze on family unification** that prevents Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza from living together with their spouses who are foreign residents, in the report *Perpetual Limbo*.
- The B'Tselem film, *Prisoners' Children*, and accompanying report, *Barred from Contact*, published this period illustrates the **many obstacles and difficulties Palestinians from the Occupied Territories face in trying to visit their relatives held in Israeli prison facilities**.
- B'Tselem fieldworkers gathered over **600** testimonies during 2006.
- B'Tselem has received very positive responses to its trilingual website launched last year, which now receives close to **3,000 visitors** every day.
- B'Tselem has expanded its use of visual images as a tool to promote human rights, amassing over **550 hours** since the beginning of 2006 and over **71,000** people have viewed B'Tselem videos on our website in the first half of 2006, **68% of whom are from within Israel**. Another **30,000** individuals have viewed B'Tselem's videos on addition Internet sites that include *Walla, Tapuz, YouTube, Google, and Yahoo*.
- B'Tselem provided **110 study tours** for groups and individuals, as well as over **100 briefings and presentations**.

A detailed description of these achievements and many others are set forth below.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

B'Tselem's activities during the reporting period reflect the planned program output, and included the following:

600 testimonies collected by B'Tselem's fieldwork research team throughout the West Bank and Gaza

Comprehensive statistics compiled on a wide range of human rights issues, based on B'Tselem's fieldwork as well as on government statements, press reports, and other sources of information.

3 in-depth reports (*Barred From Contact, Perpetual Limbo, Act of Vengeance*)

34 press releases issued in English, Hebrew and Arabic, to over 1,200 local and foreign journalists:

- **197 Palestinians and 50 Israelis killed in 2005** (*Jan. 4, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem: Hamas must Renounce War Crimes** (*Jan 26, 2006*)
- **About One-Third of the Israeli Public Does Not Know the Fence's Route** (*Jan 31, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem: Investigate Excessive Force in Amona Demolitions** (*Feb 2, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem research shows that Israel has effectively annexed the Jordan Valley** (*Feb 13, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem and Bimkom in a Press Conference: Separation Barrier's Route is Designed to Enable Settlement Expansion** (*Feb 21, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem and PHR: Parading of Naked Prisoners in Jericho Violated International Humanitarian Law** (*March 16, 2006*)
- **Precedent: Section of Separation Barrier around Jerusalem ruled Illegal – near Sheikh Sa'ed** (*March 22, 2006*)
- **Palestinian Civilians Pay with Their Lives for IDF's Refusal to Publish Open Fire Regulations** (*Apr 5, 2006*)
- **Human Rights Organizations to the Chief of Staff and Minister of Defense: Cancel the Reduction of the 'Safety Zone' for Artillery Fire on Gaza** (*Apr 11, 2006*)
- **Apologies Aren't Enough – the IDF must investigate those responsible for the death in Tulkarm** (*May 1, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem Investigation – 'Itaf Zalat was Killed by Illegal Gunfire – The Trigger-Happy Policy Continues** (*May 31, 2006*)
- **Israeli Human Rights Organizations: End Killing of Civilians** (*Jun 10, 2006*)
- **Killing of Civilians Almost Certain Consequence of Israel's Policy** (*June 22, 2006*)
- **Israeli and Palestinian Human Rights Organizations: Safeguard the life and health of the abducted soldier** (*June 27, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem to Israeli Defense Minister: Don't Damage Indispensable Civilian Facilities in Gaza** (*June 28, 2006*)
- **42 Palestinians and 3 Israelis killed in June** (*July 2, 2006*)

- **Six Human Rights Groups to the Israeli Court: stop the harm to the civilian population in Gaza** (*July 11, 2006*)
- **Killing of 9 family members in Gaza bombing: Grave suspicion of a war crime** (*July 12, 2006*)
- **Israeli Soldiers Used Palestinians as Human Shields in Gaza** (*July 20, 2006*)
- **Almost half of the fatalities in the Gaza Strip in July were civilians not taking part in the hostilities** (*August 3, 2006*)
- **Additional Findings in B'Tselem's investigation of deaths of members of the al-'Atar family by an air force missile attack** (*August 9, 2006*)
- **Israel's freeze policy on family unification in the Occupied Territories** (*August 15, 2006*)
- **Beatings and Abuse in the Shadow of War** (*August 21, 2006*)
- **76 Palestinians killed in August – over half did not participate in the hostilities** (*September 5, 2006*)
- **Following B'Tselem's Intervention, Military Police to investigate eight recent cases of soldiers abusing Palestinians** (*September 13, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem: Israel's bombing of Gaza power plant a war crime** (*September 27, 2006*)
- **Six years of Intifada** (*September 28, 2006*)
- **New Report: Israel violates the right of thousands of Palestinian families to visit detained relatives** (*October 26, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem calls for criminal investigation, on suspicion of war crimes, in the killings in Beit Hanun** (*November 8, 2006*)
- **Grave suspicion of extrajudicial execution of two wounded Palestinians** (*November 13, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem strongly condemns Palestinian rocket attack** (*November 15, 2006*)
- **B'Tselem and Al-Haq warn about killing of children playing with toy guns** (*December 27, 2006*)
- **683 killed in the conflict in 2006** (*December 28, 2006*)

10 email updates distributed by email to over **6,000 subscribers**, with hundreds of additional print copies.

9 print advertisements in the Hebrew press

2 internet banners which appeared on the Ha'aretz and Ynet websites respectively, the second of which (relating to the civilian fatalities in Beit Hanun) met with unprecedented success, with over 13,090,000 "exposures", 4 times the rate anticipated on average

3,000 website visitors per day to B'Tselem's website that contains trilingual information including comprehensive reports, summaries of reports, statistics, maps, and testimonies from Palestinians and soldiers

550 hours of video material collected and provided to journalists and filmmakers in Israel and overseas

11 new videos were made available on B'Tselem's website during this period

71,000 people have viewed B'Tselem videos on our website, **68%** of whom are from within Israel, as well as over **30,000** viewers of B'Tselem videos on Internet websites that include *Tapuz, Walla, YouTube, Google, and Yahoo.*

100 study tours for groups and individuals

100 briefings and presentations to policymakers, and other groups

250 articles in the local and international press.

Assessment of B'Tselem's identified objectives in relation to indicators, in tandem with quantifying program output, reinforces the evaluation of program activities as successful at an interim level, as follows:

Public Debate and Requests for Information on Human Rights Issues

Tens of thousands of people, the Israeli public, policymakers, journalists and other members of the international community have been exposed to testimonies, statistics, and legal analysis relating to human rights issues through B'Tselem's reports, website, and email updates. In response to B'Tselem's activities, hundreds of members of the public as well as policymakers have contacted B'Tselem by phone, mail and email to engage in discussion or critical dialogue, to request further information, donate money, or to express interest in volunteering, indicating that B'Tselem has provoked thought and debate on this topic. B'Tselem, by way of example, was also invited to give presentation to 150 legal advisors from the various government ministries, at a conference organized by the Justice Ministry. In addition, B'Tselem escorted the Settlement Advisor to the Minister of Defense to a site visit in the north to demonstrate for him the damage caused to Palestinian land, both agricultural and residential, by the government's settlement policies.

Expanded Media Coverage of Human Rights Issues

B'Tselem's reports, work with the press, and study tours have generated dozens of articles in the Israeli and international press regarding human rights issues in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, raising public awareness of these phenomena and fostering public debate.

In addition to the issue-based media coverage, public debate was sharply focused during this period on the nature and role of human rights organizations in general, and B'Tselem in particular. The extent to which B'Tselem as an organization is instantly equated with human rights in the public consciousness became strikingly apparent when a storm of debate in the print and broadcast media followed a gratuitous comment from a government attorney impugning the legitimacy of human rights organizations. Following a written submission to the High Court of Justice by an attorney from the State Prosecutor's office denigrating the role of human rights organizations in general, and B'Tselem – not a party to the case – in particular, the Attorney General immediately issued a statement praising B'Tselem's work and disassociating himself and his office from the comment made by the district prosecutor. That weekend, the television, mass circulation tabloids and *Ha'aretz*, all featured op-ed pieces by leading journalists addressing the role of human rights organizations, with B'Tselem as the

most frequently cited example. Although opinions varied as to the benefit of human rights work vis a vis the government political and security agenda, public recognition of B'Tselem and the work that we do was prominent.

One issue in particular that B'Tselem succeeded in putting on the public agenda was the issue of increased security force violence against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories during the month of the war with Lebanon. Media coverage included the widest circulating dailies and leading Internet news sites in Israel, as well as international print and broadcast media outlets. The broad coverage and the nature of the reports served as an indicator of public interest in the issue as a phenomenon, and not an isolated incident.

Changes in Israeli Government and Military Policies

As a result of the work of B'Tselem and other human rights organizations, some incremental changes have been made, including: a slight increase in the number of military investigations opened against soldiers alleged to have abused, injured or killed Palestinians, and the procedures followed in conducting them (double the number of investigations opened than in the same period in each of the preceding five years, and a requirement of notification to the IDF Judge Advocate General of the death of a Palestinian civilian at the hands of the security forces, including preliminary findings within 48 hours of the incident); several changes in the route of the Separation Barrier that ease the impact on Palestinians in the given areas; a welcome decision by the High Court of Justice that invalidates the state's expanded exemption from tort liability in cases where Palestinians have been killed or injured by the security forces; and the High Court of Justice imposed limitations on Israel's targeted killing policies.

Number of hits on B'Tselem's website

As noted above, the number of visitors per day to B'Tselem's website stands at **3,000**, an increase of 1,000 hits per day over the preceding period. In addition, of the **71,000** people who have viewed B'Tselem videos on our website during this period, 68% are from within Israel, a two-fold increase attributable to B'Tselem's media campaign on the Separation Barrier.

Use of B'Tselem's information and material by policymakers

The output data presented above demonstrates the extent to which B'Tselem's materials and information have reached policymakers both in Israel and internationally. The immediate feedback from presentations and briefings to policymakers, including a public hearing in Geneva where B'Tselem presented a paper on freedom of movement in the Occupied Territories before the European Union's Sub-committee on Human Rights, indicate the extent to which policymakers find the material useful. In addition, B'Tselem regularly receives requests for briefings for information from foreign delegations for use in their own reports and briefings. B'Tselem is a regular stop for foreign policymakers and human rights officials visiting the region, including UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's Chief of Staff, Iqbal Riza, the US Ambassador Richard Jones and his senior staff, John Dugard UNCHR Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Territories, Ms. Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sir Hilary Benn, MP, Secretary of State for International Development, the UK International Development Committee, parliamentary groups from Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, a delegation from the International Legal Assistance Consortium, one EU delegation investigating "Wider Europe," and a second group of EU Parliamentarians

addressing human rights issues, diplomats from Ireland, Sweden and Russia, and government officials from England, and Norway addressing humanitarian issues in the Occupied Territories. B'Tselem also met with the international director of Amnesty International, Irene Khan.

Within Israel, B'Tselem has been contacted by Knesset members who make use of B'Tselem materials in parliamentary hearings. One example of this is that in response to B'Tselem's video reenactment of the IDF killing of Tulkarm resident Itaf Zalaf, who was sitting in the living room of her family home at the time she was shot by IDF forces, MK Dov Hanin sent a letter to the Minister of Defense Amir Peretz calling for an investigation.

Building Organizational Capacity

B'Tselem staff members participated in a variety of training and enrichment sessions during the reporting period. Two two-day training sessions were organized for fieldworkers, focusing on skill-building in testimony collection, the multiple uses of filmed testimony, the legal context for their documentation work, and sexual harassment training.

B'Tselem organized a seminar for the staff and Board of Directors, addressing the challenges facing human rights organizations in the current environment. B'Tselem also invited staff from the organizations Hamoked, Bimkom, PCATI and ACRI. The presenters included Professor Tamar Herman (public opinion surveys), Dave Kretzmer (the legal status of Gaza) and Menahem Klein (Palestinian internal political situation) and subsequent discussion centered on the implications of the issues presented for the work of human rights organizations.

B'Tselem frequently assists other organizations in capacity building within B'Tselem's areas of expertise. The Worker's Hotline consulted with B'Tselem about plans to expand its outreach to the international press. B'Tselem advised them and provided them with access to our database of the foreign correspondents in Israel.

B'Tselem also provides assistance to many organizations in order to advance human rights issues. Most prominently this year, B'Tselem's Fieldwork Director has assisted in documenting and investigating illegal settlement outposts to assist researchers from the organization Peace Now. In one particular case, the court challenge brought by Peace Now to dismantle the illegal outpost of Migron, B'Tselem conducted all of the field research, which Peace Now has acknowledged was essential to the successful ruling to evacuate the outpost. In addition, B'Tselem fieldworkers frequently assist legal organizations in gathering information necessary for High Court of Justice petitions including providing documentation to ACRI for their petition on freedom of movement, and to HaMoked on the issue of freedom of movement.

B'Tselem staff is also invited to present expert information in the human rights field. In the past year, B'Tselem's research director gave a presentation on IHL to staff members of ABC, and the data coordination director presented a lecture on human rights in an online course on conflict resolution at SUNY Potsdam.

circulation daily, reaching an audience never-before addressed by B'Tselem's campaigns. Another 4 advertisements appeared in Ha'aretz. In addition, the messages contained in these advertisements appeared as Internet banners on Israel's most popular websites. B'Tselem also used the audiovisual capacities developed by the organization in the campaign. A special mini-Website was prepared, containing an animated presentation, and additional visual and statistical information on the route of the Separation Barrier and its impact.

- B'Tselem issued a **briefing on Israel's de facto annexation of the Jordan Valley** and its impact that generated significant media coverage in Israel and overseas, including a report featuring B'Tselem's Director of Fieldwork Research on the Channel One nightly news and reports in the *BBC*, the *Guardian*, *Haaretz*, *Ynet*, *AFP*, *AP*, the *Belfast Telegraph*, *Irish Times*, *ABC Australia* as well as other print and Internet news sources.
- B'Tselem produced a comprehensive brochure entitled *A Wall in Jerusalem: Obstacles to Human Rights in the Holy City*, a compilation of data, research and personal stories presenting the impact of the separation barrier and a range of other municipal and state policies on the residents of Jerusalem. B'Tselem disseminated the publication internationally, and continue to use it as a central tool in our Jerusalem study tours.
- B'Tselem called attention of the public and policymakers to the high number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces resulting directly from a series of Israeli policies, including illegal expansion of Israel's open-fire regulations, deliberate vagueness and double messages regarding the use of force, violation of the principle of proportionality and the failure to conduct independent investigations into civilian deaths. A position paper gave background information into all of these policies. **B'Tselem's reports on specific incidents of civilian killings, as well as the general call to protect civilian populations** were cited in reports by the *BBC*, *USA Today*, *AP*, *Irish Examiner*, *Al Jazeera*, the *Scotsman* and the *Middle East Times*, among others. In addition, regarding the killing of 14-year old Iman a-Hams by IDF soldiers, a case that B'Tselem had helped to make the focus of public attention, the High Court instructed the military to investigate whether illegal open fire regulations were in force at the time of her killing two years ago.
- B'Tselem produced **two ground-breaking videos**, as a new research and documentation tool, that generated attention among the public, the media and policymakers: 1) video reconstruction of the IDF killing of 43 year old Itaf Zalat as she sat with her family in her living room in Tulkarm; and 2) a new video, *Lethal Ambiguity*, that features Israeli combat soldiers talking about the IDF's rules of engagement for using lethal force, and shows that the orders given to soldiers are vague, and generate a culture of excessive force and little accountability for the many civilian deaths that result.
- B'Tselem continued to generate attention to the issue of **military accountability**, advocacy work which, together with the work of other human rights organizations, has resulted in an incremental increase in the number of investigations opened. B'Tselem, together with other human rights organizations, has continued to seek verification of the claims made by the military and to monitor both individual cases and broad policies. **As a result of B'Tselem's documenting and publicizing the increased incidents of beating and abuse of Palestinians by security force personnel in July and August, investigations were opened in the eight**

cases B'Tselem publicized. Media coverage of this issue and the pending High Court of Justice petition included reports in *Ha'aretz*, the *Jerusalem Post*, and *Walla* Internet news site.

- B'Tselem initiated a **strategy of targeting celebrities as a conduit to reaching the broader public**, inviting prominent Israeli actress, Orli Weiser, to participate in a study tour of the Separation Barrier. She then organized a group of leading figures in the entertainment industry to join her on a second tour, which was widely covered locally, both in the print media (*Yediot Ahronot*) and on leading Internet news sites. The tours now appear in entertainment magazines such as *Time Out Tel Aviv*, and other local tour and activity guides.
- B'Tselem was awarded the prestigious **Rafael Lemkin Human Rights Award** by Rabbis for Human Rights– North America, together with the Center for Constitutional Rights, in recognition of B'Tselem's work to bring about human rights protections in the Occupied Territories. B'Tselem's executive director, Jessica Montell, was a featured speaker at the ceremony and accompanying rabbinical conference held in New York.
- B'Tselem launched an initiative to **focus public attention on Israel's responsibilities in Gaza**, particularly regarding Israel's bombing of the electrical plant. B'Tselem's report, *Act of Vengeance*, was reinforced by 3 short films, Internet banners and advertising in the print media. Issues addressed included the high rate of civilian deaths from IDF fire and the severity of the humanitarian crisis. Media coverage included detailed articles on Israel's central Internet news sites *NRG*, *YNet*, *NFC*, *Walla* and *MSN*. The print coverage included reports in *Ha'aretz*, *Al-Quds*, *Globes*, *The Jerusalem Post*, and *Al-Hi'yat*. In addition, in a follow-up article on YNet featuring the report findings, the Minister of Infrastructure announced his undertaking to connect a high tension power line from Israel to Gaza to supply some of the electricity lost. In conjunction with this campaign, B'Tselem also initiated a multi-organization position paper and call to the international community to ensure human rights in the Gaza Strip.

- **Advertisement: "Darkness"** The advertisement (see insert) in *Ha'aretz* addressed Israel's deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure. The text emphasized that Israel's legitimate goal of protecting the security of its citizens does not entail imposing misery on Palestinian civilians.
- B'Tselem focused official and public attention on the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians affected by the **freeze on family unification** that prevents Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza from living together with their spouses who are foreign residents in the report *Perpetual Limbo*. The media coverage B'Tselem generated included articles in the *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *BBC*, *Palestinian Chronicle* and the *Boston Globe*.
- The B'Tselem film *Prisoners' Children* and accompanying report *Barred from Contact* published this period illustrates the many obstacles and difficulties Palestinians from the Occupied Territories face in trying to visit their relatives held



