



Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association

Abu Dis Human Rights report

A month in Abu Dis, July 2015

The people of Abu Dis continued to suffer on a daily basis from the restrictions and violence of the occupation: the huge

Separation Wall, the ID system and the checkpoints all round them, the constriction and loss of land to the settlements, and the almost-daily incursions of fully-armed Israeli soldiers

because of the presence of a military camp right in the middle of town. The first half of July 2015 was Ramadan.

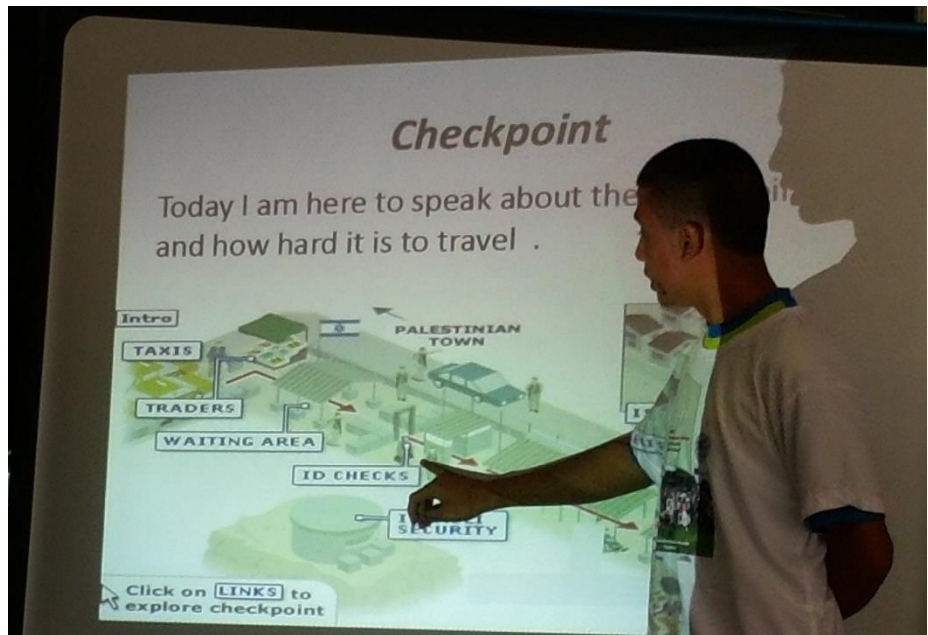
Major concerns for people of Abu Dis in July were the Israeli permissions to get to Jerusalem and imprisonment, until the last day of the month when settler violence reached a new peak in the burning of a house down in the north of the West Bank.



Father, mother and baby Ali from the Al Dawabsheh family. The little one was burned alive and his mother and father have since died (in August and September) as a result of burns received when their house in Duma village was set on fire by settlers on 31st July

Abu Dis and Jerusalem in Ramadan

All year long, many aspects of people's lives in Abu Dis are dominated by the Israeli occupation, the Separation Wall, checkpoints and the pass system. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (in the Al Aqsa Mosque compound) can be seen from many parts of the town, across the other side of the



Separation Wall but not far away. It is not many years since people from Abu Dis were able to walk there. But now the way there is through some of the checkpoints called 'terminals' – very like international frontiers – that the Israelis have made in the Wall. Not all of them as some of these are for people with blue IDs only, while most West Bankers are given green IDs.

This is a picture outside the Zaytouneh terminal – The Israelis have blocked a previous car park with new bits of wall. Here you can see part of a crowd of hundreds stretching into the terminal.

It's worth remembering that Jerusalem is the historic capital of Palestine and Abu Dis has historically been in its suburb. When, following the pulls and pushes the proposal was that Jerusalem (including Abu Dis) should become an international city and it was not put on one 'side' or the other. In 1948 however, West Jerusalem was taken by force into the part of the country that became Israel. East Jerusalem and Abu Dis were ruled



by Jordan like the rest of the West Bank for the 19 years until 1967 when Israel occupied the remaining parts of Palestine. Then East Jerusalem

was claimed by the Israelis as part of Israel while Abu Dis was treated as separate, part of the West Bank, and the residents of the two separated by their ID cards. The divisions have become ever deeper and the huge Separation Wall now cuts through the built up area including Abu Dis itself to firmly divide the areas.

In Ramadan, many people wish to go to Jerusalem even more than at other times of year, in particular to visit the Al Aqsa Mosque. As the wish to get there intensifies, so do the level of humiliation and the contradictory games that are played by the Israelis in charge of the system whereby West Bankers need to apply to the Israeli Civil Department for 'permissions' to get to Jerusalem.

Even if they do get permissions, Palestinians have to enter the city through the massive checkpoints in the Separation Wall that are known as 'terminals', using tiny gates and turnstiles and humiliating procedures. These terminals are manned by the Israeli military and are always a pressure point. Here across the year there are violent incidents.

Shot for trying to get to Jerusalem

Many people do not get permission, and this Ramadan was full of attempts to get into Jerusalem by climbing the Wall – risky in every way.

Many people were captured by Israelis after they had climbed the Wall to the other side. Some young boys from Abu Dis were caught by Israeli soldiers when they climbed the wall near Abu Dis. The Israelis put them in a military jeep all the way to



Kiryat Arba settlement near Hebron and released them from there.

Mohammed Al Qusbeh, a youth of 17 from Qalandia refugee camp was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers when he was trying to climb the Wall. (It seems that he was the brother of two young men who had also been shot by Israelis in previous years).

New temporary permissions

Suddenly this Ramadan (for the second year running) many new people were given temporary permissions to go to Jerusalem. While this is a celebration in many ways – a day release from a prison – this seems to connect to an economic success for



Israel a year ago when they did a similar thing: prices of goods in Palestine rise so much in Ramadan that suddenly there is a difference in prices on both sides of the Wall, and Palestinian shopkeepers were left with unsold goods while the malls of West Jerusalem suddenly cheaper - benefited enormously from Palestinian purchases for Ramadan and for Eid. Those in Palestine who are part of the growing campaign to boycott Israeli goods see the sudden new 'permissions' to go to Jerusalem

at a time when prices are so unequal as an attempt to defeat the boycott.

EYE WITNESS 1: HUMILIATION FOR NOTHING

On the second day of Eid, I turned up with my family at the Al Zaytouna terminal to go to Jerusalem. We arrived at the terminal at 1 in the afternoon. There were hundreds of people there – I understand that there were thousands in the day as a whole. People told me that that day the Israelis had decided to close Qalandia terminal which is the biggest one around Jerusalem, so all the people who had tried to go through Qalandia came instead to Al Zaytouna. People were standing outside in a very hot open space, directly under the sun. There were about twenty soldiers standing between them and the terminal, blocking the way and shouting at people.

One police officer was standing on a wall and shouting at people, trying to divide families. He wanted men to stand in one queue and women in another queue and children in a line. Who is going to leave his wife and little ones to see if he could go in separately and maybe end up in Jerusalem without them? On the other side of the terminal, there were family members waiting for people. I saw one man stand on the wall and shout at the crowd that he had been waiting for four hours, as his wife had been allowed to go through to the other side and he was still waiting in the men's queue to be able to join her. The other side of the wall has become a completely different country, although it is still Aizariyeh.

We spent around 45 minutes there. In that space of time, hundreds of other new people came to join the crowd – cars were unloading people and there was no time for them to wait. During this time, not one single person was allowed to enter. The soldiers were shouting at people, pointing their guns and sometimes joking.

It was a joke to give us permission to go to Jerusalem and no chance to go there. So we, like many others, tore up the piece of paper giving us permission, and went back home.

EYE WITNESS 2 ... ONE DAY AFTER TWELVE YEARS

“The most painful thing is to feel like a stranger in your own city ... 12 years of not being able to visit the city to walk on the streets and markets ...

To get into Jerusalem by passing through the checkpoints is a hard process, waiting on the terminal, passing through the electronic gates from one to the other, watching others who were not allowed to go through... honestly when I was on the other side it was like being released from jail, not just passing to the other side of the Wall.

Even with the permission in your pocket, you still have the fear inside you, you can't tell where it is still safe to go or not to go. The whole system has changed, there are settlers everywhere.

The first stop for myself was the Mount of Olives which is the last part of the city behind the Wall, I don't remember seeing all these huge Israeli flags on top of house roofs around this neighbourhood ever. Now they are everywhere you look. The streets were changed - they even have different names. The shocking part which was very difficult was to see all the settlers wandering around comfortably in Salahuddin Street, around Damascus Gate.

I remember the bus station which used to be a big, wide place and serve the whole of Palestine. Now it has shrunk, there are buses only for a few places, the neighbourhoods inside the Wall. It's very confusing getting across Jerusalem now, I had to keep asking people, because so much has changed – there are buses and a new tramline, and it isn't clear which buses are safe to go in – are they Palestinian, or Israeli? I got into a bus to return to Abu Dis and it was about to leave when I discovered that it now goes to Abu Dis on the west of the Wall, because the Wall goes across Abu Dis. Imagine if I had stayed on it, it would take hours to get back to a point where I could cross the Wall to get to the Abu Dis on the east of the Wall.”

In any case, compared to the denial of permission that had been happening for the previous years, the issues of 'permissions' seemed welcome. It was presented as a gift to people although Jerusalem is part of Palestine; it should be remembered that the Separation Wall and the movement restrictions that have become normal for Palestinians under Israeli occupation are violations of their human rights.

The permissions given were not straightforward however, as people were given specific days, times, terminals (the checkpoints in the Wall) that they were allowed to be there. Many took advantage of this but many were not able to. The air was full of stories of people given permission while their children are not, given permission and having it taken away, some in a family given permission to go only on Fridays, while others are given permissions but not on Fridays. Many turned up to the

terminals to find massive crowds waiting in huge heat to pass through the turnstiles and the checking procedures that have been built by the Israelis.



Demonstration against administrative detention and in support of the case of Mohammed Alan.

Imprisonment of children and imprisonment without trial

On Thursday 16th July, two boys from Abu Dis (Mohammed Jaffal and Salah Hadidoun both aged 16) were arrested when the Israeli army invaded their houses. They were taken to Maale Adumim interrogation centre before being taken to Orfa Jail.

Mohammed Alan who had been arrested under administrative detention (that is imprisonment without trial) continued the hunger strike on 16th June when the Israelis extended the period of his administrative detention by six months. The Knesset passed a law allowing force-feeding of hunger-strikers but the doctors in the prison hospital where Mohammed was now living refused to implement this.

Settler violence

In Jerusalem, in Hebron, in the villages of the West Bank, people are regularly bullied by armed and violent Israeli settlers. Palestinians have been pushed or frightened from their houses, beaten, injured or killed by settler violence and by the Israeli army working to protect the settlers, ever since the Israeli occupation began. Abu Dis has lost people to the settlements, for example Ali Afaneh who was aged 11

when he was shot and killed during the time of construction of Maale Adumim (see our book 'Voices from Abu Dis.'

The horrendous arson attack by Israeli settlers on a Palestinian family house near Nablus on 31st July 2015 killed a toddler of 18 months, Ali Dawabsha, and left his family badly burned and struggling to survive. This attack was not the first, and attacks have continued since then.

Racism and bullying have been part of the Israeli settlement project from the beginning. This is a project to take over land without the Palestinian people, so land has been taken by theft and force and the local people have been progressively pushed back by just such tactics as happened on 31st July.