



# MADRE

AN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION

Spring 2004

## Hunger in Palestine

A MADRE backgrounder based on *The Right to Food*,  
a report by UN Special Rapporteur Jean Ziegler



photographer unknown

Families in Palestine are struggling to survive with little food or water.

In July 2003, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food traveled to the West Bank and Gaza Strip to investigate the growing crisis of food insecurity for Palestinian families living under Israeli occupation. The UN mission found that, "The Occupied Palestinian Territories is on the verge of humanitarian

catastrophe as a result of extremely harsh security measures imposed by the occupying Israeli forces."<sup>1</sup>

This backgrounder summarizes the mission's findings, presents some solutions to the growing problem of hunger in the Occupied Territories and explores the concept of the "right to food" as a human right.

backgrounder





Ziad Abbas

New fences, security check points and restrictions on freedom of movement for Palestinians are worsening the food crisis.

### ON THE VERGE OF HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE

- :: In the West Bank and Gaza today, over 22% of children under five suffer from malnutrition, compared to 7.6% in the year 2000.<sup>2</sup>
- :: Over 15% of children under the age of five suffer from acute anemia, which will permanently damage the physical and mental development of many.
- :: Food consumption has fallen by more than 30% per person.
- :: Key high-protein foods, such as meat, poultry and dairy products (especially infant formula and powdered milk) are now hard to obtain.
- :: More than half of Palestinian households now eat only once a day.
- :: The number of people living in extreme poverty has tripled since 2000 to include 60% of

the population. Even when food is available, many Palestinians cannot afford to buy it.

### What is causing Palestine's food crisis?

- :: According to the UN mission, "The extensive imposition of curfews, road closures, permit systems and security checkpoints... imposed by the occupying military forces are producing the humanitarian crisis."
- :: **Curfews:** Sometimes imposed for many consecutive days, curfews confine families to their homes without access to food or water. In the city of Nablus, for example, Palestinians were under curfew for a total of two and a half months in Summer

2002. A 2002 USAID study found that curfews were a primary reason why people are eating less.

- :: **Closure:** Israeli forces have barricaded or destroyed thousands of roads, barring Palestinians from moving freely between towns and villages. Journeys that used to take a few minutes now take several hours or days, even to reach the next village. Trucks carrying food and water are sometimes held for days at a time at military checkpoints.
- :: **Permits:** Palestinians are required to have permits to travel from one village to another. Permits are often denied without explanation. Hundreds of thousands of people cannot reach their jobs.
- :: **Land confiscation:** Israel has taken more than 45% of land in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including most of the best agricultural land. Land is confiscated for the expansion of Israeli settlements, roads and "security buffers," which are illegal under international law.<sup>3</sup>
- :: **Destruction of food and water sources and infrastructure:** Since 2000, the Israeli military has destroyed hundreds of thousands of olive and fruit trees, thousands of roof-top water tanks and hundreds of wells and agricultural warehouses throughout the West Bank and Gaza.

**Together, these policies prevent Palestinians from growing, harvesting, marketing, storing, transporting and buying food and water.**

According to the World Bank, "the proximate cause of the Palestinian economic crisis is closure."



Aren't these policies necessary to protect Israelis from attack by Palestinian militants?

- :: The Israeli government does have an obligation to protect its citizens from attacks. The policies that most threaten Palestinian food security, however, cannot be justified as effective security measures.
- :: Consider the closure, ostensibly designed to prevent attacks against Israelis. In reality, the closure does not effectively curtail those most likely to carry out attacks. Anyone able and determined to walk for miles and move clandestinely can almost always find a way around the checkpoints and barricades. Those whose freedom of movement is curtailed are, in effect, parents with young children, the elderly, disabled, or sick and anyone relying on roads to transport or shop for food.
- :: Moreover, international law sets conditions on the measures that governments can take to improve security for their populations. These measures must be proportional to the threat at hand and must not prevent the Occupying Power from respecting its obligation to ensure the basic needs of the inhabitants of the Occupied Territory.<sup>4</sup>
- :: The UN mission found that Israel's policies are "entirely disproportionate" because they endanger the food security of the whole Palestinian population and thus amount to collective punishment.

## Israel's "Apartheid Wall" Threatens Palestinians' Right to Food

:: Israel's "security fence," which peace activists call the "Apartheid Wall," is a huge, heavily militarized electrified barrier cutting deep into the West Bank. The wall *de facto* annexes thousands of hectares of the richest Palestinian farmland and key water resources, thus severely threatening Palestinians' right to food.

:: Over 200,000 Palestinians (roughly 10% of the population) are being cut off from their farmlands and water, or are being trapped between the Wall and Israel's 1967 border.

:: For example, 40,000 people in the city of Qalqilya will be surrounded by a 26-foot high wall, with only one road out controlled by Israeli soldiers. Farmers are separated from their fields by the wall. Villagers were promised gates through which to access their fields. Only one gate has been built and those who have tried to use it have been beaten or shot at by Israeli soldiers.

Visit [www.stopthewall.org](http://www.stopthewall.org) to support Palestinians and Israelis working against the Apartheid Wall.

Then why is Israel implementing these policies?

- :: The policies of closure, land confiscation and settlement-building enable Israel to take control over more and more Palestinian land while confining Palestinians to smaller and smaller areas.
- :: With this strategy, Israel is able to ensure its continuous rule over most of the West Bank and Gaza both directly, by taking land, and indirectly, by encircling almost every Palestinian community by Israeli-controlled territory.
- :: Any Palestinian "state" that could emerge under this arrangement would be permanently dependent on Israel. Deprived of a coherent land base, Palestinians would be effectively cut off from land and water resources and forced to serve as a reserve of cheap labor for Israel. Their government would be unable to control its natural resources, trade, economy or borders, and thus lack true sovereignty.
- :: Economic strangulation, including widespread hunger, is also a means of eroding Palestinians' will to insist on their right to self-determination. Emulating a strategy used by the US against Nicaragua, Cuba and Iraq, Israeli Prime Minister Sharon has stated that: "I want an agreement, but first [the Palestinians] have to be beaten so that they get the thought out of their minds that they can impose an agreement on Israel that Israel does not want."<sup>5</sup>



## Water shortages are as severe as food shortages

Water shortages, which threaten health and hygiene, have resulted from closures and Israeli military incursions.

According to the Palestinian Hydrology Group, 24 out of 27 villages surveyed experienced water problems as a result of curfews and closures.

Several Palestinian communities have no independent water supply and rely on truck deliveries of water, which are severely disrupted by closures. For example, in June 2002, Beit Furik village received no water for nine consecutive days because Israeli soldiers detained water tankers.

Per person, Israelis receive and use five times more water than Palestinians. According to Oxfam, Israel extracts more than 85% of the water from West Bank aquifers — a violation of international law.

## What is the Right to Food?

- :: The right to food means having **regular and permanent access** to enough high quality food (either directly or through being able to buy food) that corresponds to one's cultural traditions and helps ensure that people enjoy a fulfilling and dignified life.<sup>6</sup>
- :: The right to food includes access to drinking water and irrigation water needed to grow food for one's family.<sup>7</sup>
- :: The right to food is rooted in international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Rome Declaration on World Food Security. The State of Israel has ratified all the principal instruments which protect the right to food.<sup>8</sup>
- :: For Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, the right to food is one of many social and economic human rights — such as the rights to housing, an adequate standard of living, health care, education and social security — that are violated by Israel's occupation policies.<sup>9</sup>

## Israel is obliged to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to food

- :: Food is obviously a necessity, so why is it important to conceptualize a *right* to food? The knowledge that access to food is not only a biological need but also a human right can empower people to demand that governments meet their

obligation under international law to **respect, protect, and fulfill** this right.

## What Does International Law Say About Palestine's Food Crisis?

- :: As the occupying power in the West Bank and Gaza, Israel is obliged to **respect, protect and fulfill** the right to food.
- :: **Respecting the right to food** means that Israel must not disrupt people's access to food and water. Policies that prevent food and water from reaching communities; bar people from their fields or food shops; undermine people's financial capacity to buy food; and reduce the availability or quality of food and water are violations of this obligation.
- :: **Protecting the right to food** means that Israel must protect Palestinian civilians from anyone trying to hinder their access to food and water. Israel violates this obligation by refusing to prosecute settlers who harass and shoot at Palestinians when they are working in their fields

or who rampage through Palestinian communities destroying food shops and infrastructure that people need to obtain food and water.<sup>10</sup>

- :: **Fulfilling the right to food** means that Israel is obligated to facilitate people's capacity to



*(continued from page 4)*

feed themselves, and as a last resort, to provide food assistance to people who cannot feed themselves. Israel violates this obligation through its strangulation of the Palestinian economy and agricultural sector, which has caused unprecedented numbers of Palestinians to become dependent on food aid.

## What can we do?

**IMMEDIATELY:** Make a contribution to MADRE's Emergency Food Aid for Palestine program to provide urgently needed food relief to some of the poorest families in Deheisheh Refugee Camp, near Bethlehem. See coupon on back page.

**SHORT TERM:** Visit our website, [www.MADRE.org](http://www.MADRE.org), to join the campaign calling on the government of Israel to **respect, protect** and **fulfill** the right to food for people living under its military occupation. Israel must:

- :: Stop obstructing humanitarian relief services.
- :: End the system of closures, curfews, checkpoints and permit systems that is blocking Palestinians' economic and physical access to food and water.
- :: Stop the destruction and confiscation of Palestinian lands, water and other resources and infrastructure so that Palestinians can repair their economy and reverse their dependency on food aid.

**LONG TERM:** Demand an end to US sponsorship of Israeli human rights violations. Join MADRE and the US Campaign to End Israeli Occupation in supporting a Middle East settlement based on human rights, international law and guarantees of justice and security for both Palestinians and Israelis. ♦



Together with our partner, the Ibdaa Cultural Center, MADRE is working to deliver emergency food and water supplies to families in the Deheisheh Refugee Camp near Bethlehem. Please see coupon on reverse to make a contribution.

Terry Rempel

## Denying Humanitarian Aid to Palestinian Communities

:: Despite Israel's obligation to ensure the survival of people living under its occupation and to provide assistance when necessary, it is the UN and other humanitarian organizations that have had to step in to provide food aid to Palestinians.

:: Israel routinely restricts people's access to humanitarian aid through checkpoints and closures. In June 2003, the UN's Relief Works Agency reported 231 instances of food aid being excessively delayed or denied passage at Israeli army checkpoints.

**MADRE is a member of the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, which aims to change those US policies that sustain Israel's 37-year occupation of the Palestinian West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, and deny equal rights for all.**





Zaid Abbas

The crisis of food security places a tremendous burden on Palestinian women, who are overwhelmingly responsible for feeding their families.

## ENDNOTES

1. "The Right to Food: Report by the Special Rapporteur, Jean Ziegler, Addendum Mission to the Occupied Palestinian Territories," (E/CN.4/2004/10/Add.2).
2. A comprehensive nutritional assessment of the West Bank and Gaza was conducted in 2002 by John Hopkins University and CARE and is available at <[http://www.careusa.org/newsroom/pressreleases/2003/jan/01032003\\_study.pdf](http://www.careusa.org/newsroom/pressreleases/2003/jan/01032003_study.pdf)>.
3. Illegality of settlements is outlined under Article 49(6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This has been reaffirmed by the UN Security Council and General Assembly, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions. For data on land confiscated by Israel see, for example, "The Israeli Security Zones Make up 45.25% of the West Bank Including 158 Israeli Colonies," at *Monitoring Israeli Colonizing Activities in the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza*, June 2002, <[www.poica.org/casestudies/security-zones/index.htm](http://www.poica.org/casestudies/security-zones/index.htm)>.
4. According to the Fourth Geneva Convention, as the occupying power, Israel is obligated to provide food and water if the resources in the Territories are inadequate (Article 55).
5. *Israeli Nightly News*, March 4, 2002.
6. "The Right to Food: Report by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Mr. Jean Ziegler, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/10," (E/CN.4/2001/53).
7. "The Right to Food: Note by the Secretary-General," (A/56/210). Also, "The right to food: Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler, in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2002/25," (E/CN.4/2003/54).
8. Including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
9. These rights are established in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and further elaborated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
10. See, for example, "Foreseen But Not Prevented: The Performance of Law Enforcement Authorities in Responding to Settler Attacks on Olive Harvesters," *The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*, November 2002, <[www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)>.

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## MADRE is

an international women's human rights organization that works in partnership with women's community-based groups in conflict areas worldwide. Our programs address issues of sustainable development, community improvement and women's health; violence and war; discrimination and racism; self-determination and collective rights; women's leadership development; and human rights education. MADRE provides resources and training to enable our sister organizations to meet immediate needs in their communities and develop long-term solutions to the crises they face. Since we began in 1983, MADRE has delivered over 20 million dollars worth of support to community-based women's groups in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Africa, the Balkans and the United States.

## I want to help deliver food and water ...

to families in Deheisheh Refugee Camp. Please use my enclosed tax-deductible gift to provide nourishment to families facing a severe food crisis. Here is my gift:

- \$25 will buy enough milk for one child for an entire month.
- \$50 will buy 110 lbs of rice and 15 lbs of chicken.
- \$100 will buy enough rice, beans, meat and milk to feed a family of five for 15 days.
- \$200 will feed a family of five for an entire month.
- \$500 will feed a family of six for two months.
- Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_. Whatever amount you can send will be a great help!

### To donate by credit card, please fill out the following information:

Please charge my:  VISA  MASTERCARD for the amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ACCOUNT # \_\_\_\_\_

EXP. DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

### Please send me more information about MADRE's programs for women and families in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

MADRE is a registered tax-exempt charitable organization. All contributions to MADRE are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

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