

## **Israel Implements New Permit Regime and Policy of Forcible Transfer of Palestinians from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip**

In the past year Israel has escalated its policy of separating the Palestinian populations of the Gaza Strip and West Bank from each other. The separation regime tears families apart, puts thousands at risk of expulsion to the Gaza Strip and turns Palestinians into "illegal aliens" in their own home. This policy is revealed in a position paper published today (Wednesday 10 September) by human rights organizations **HaMoked** and **B'Tselem**.

As of November 2007, Israel requires Palestinians whose registered address is in Gaza to apply for a temporary permit to remain in the West Bank. This, even if they have lived in the West Bank for many years, established their homes there, and, in some cases even if they were born in the West Bank. Moreover, in the past year, the military has taken active measures to locate and expel Palestinians from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip under the pretext that they are "illegal aliens."

Israel is exploiting the hardship of families which are split between the West Bank and Gaza Strip to force them to move to Gaza permanently. Israel requires Palestinians wishing to enter Gaza to sign an undertaking never to return to the West Bank. On the other hand, Palestinians from Gaza wishing to enter the West Bank for medical treatment, family visits etc., are required to deposit a large sum of money to guarantee their return to Gaza. For example:

- A Gazan bride and her parents who wanted to travel to the West Bank for the wedding ceremony were required to deposit NIS 20,000 to guarantee their return to Gaza – including the bride.
- A resident of Qalqiliya wishing to enter the Gaza Strip to visit her ailing husband was informed by the military that the visit would be approved only if she undertook never to return to her home in the West Bank.
- A man, originally from Hebron, who resides with his wife and children in the Gaza Strip visited his mother in the West Bank. When he asked to return home, the military refused to let him go to Gaza or to let his family from Gaza come to Hebron. After a year of separation, the military said the father would be allowed to return to Gaza if he signs an undertaking never to return to the West Bank.

The High Court of Justice has recently backed Israel's policy of denying Palestinian residents of the Territories the right to choose where they wish to reside, live with their families and travel between Gaza and the West Bank. In the past, the Court accepted army-imposed restrictions on Palestinian movement, but made efforts to promote compromises between the parties. This has changed and in its rulings the Court now puts its seal of approval on Israel's policy which blocks passage entirely.

**HaMoked and B'Tselem demand that Israel immediately renew freedom of movement between the two parts of the Occupied Territory and avoid any forcible transfers from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip. The international community must protest the violation of Palestinians' rights to freedom of movement, to family life and to choose where they wish to live and take action to secure these rights.**

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