Israel: Sharon government builds fortified wall around West Bank

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Israel's construction of a military wall that will seal off the West Bank continues apace.

Work first began on the wall in July of 2002. The concrete and iron monstrosity is to be one of the largest and most heavily fortified man-made walls in history—more than four times the length of the Berlin Wall.

The final construction is intended to encircle the entire West Bank, effectively imprisoning the Palestinian population. The government of Ariel Sharon claims that the construction is for "security" purposes—to exclude Islamic fundamentalists and suicide bombers.

In reality, the wall is consistent with schemes to ethnically cleanse those areas presently inhabited by the Palestinian people and grab the land for the Israeli state. Not surprisingly, the wall has been dubbed "Apartheid Wall" by Palestinians living in its shadows.

The construction is slated to cost an estimated $2 billion. Whilst no completed maps of the wall have yet been released by the Sharon government, information has begun to filter out.

The wall will stand eight metres high and will be up to 220 miles long when completed. The surface is being made from large, grey, concrete slabs and watchtowers will be built at 300-metre intervals.

The fortifications surrounding the wall will be some 100 metres wide. On either side will be military roads that will be used for tanks, armoured Jeeps and other war vehicles. Beyond the roads, trenches some six metres wide and four metres deep will be dug.

Protecting the wall will be barbed wire, cameras, motion detectors and electrified fencing. Beyond that, exclusion zones are being established that will be between 35 and 50 metres in width. Certain parts of the area will be covered in a material that is able to electronically detect the footprints of those attempting to breach the wall.

It has been estimated that construction of the wall will entail the seizure of a further 10 percent of the West Bank. It is not only land that Israel is seizing, but other vital resources such as the western mountain aquifer that is situated under the 1967 green line. The aquifer presently supplies West Bank Palestinians with over 50 percent of their water.

Jamal Juma of the Palestinian Environmental Network said, "Once the wall is up it will cripple Palestinian agriculture and economic activity, and turn the West Bank into a series of disconnected, dependent entities or Bantustans. It will make life unliveable and cause the Palestinians to leave, which is what Israel, currently clamouring for transfer or ethnic cleansing, wants."

Since construction begun, the first 70-mile-long northern part of the wall has already resulted in 15 Palestinian villages being stranded between the wall and the green line. An additional 15 villages have been separated from farm land they previously relied upon, which is now located the other side of the wall.

Journalist Jessica McCallin has reported: "It will not be a straight wall. It will twist and turn, jutting, at times, tens of miles into the West Bank to include settlement clusters and corridors. Huge walled arms are expected to punch deep into the occupied territory, especially around the holy cities of Nablus and Hebron, which have been settled by extremist, religious Jews. Nor will it follow the green line, the 1949 armistice line between Israel and the Arab states which now delineates Israel and the West Bank and—according to the Palestinians—should be used as the basis of a border between an independent Palestine and Israel."

She found that in one area, "a contiguous 90 square

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kilometres has already been seized. Homes have been demolished and farmland destroyed to make way for the wall."

Human Rights groups and Palestinian organisations have pointed out that the wall will act not only as an effective border between the West Bank and Israel, but between the West Bank and Jordan as well.

The section of the wall around Jerusalem will be some 54 kilometres in length and will encircle the land seized by Israel since 1967. Most of this seized land is in the east of Jerusalem and the surrounding area. The wall in this area will consist of a series of juts and bends, as it includes Israeli settlements and excludes Palestinian communities. Some of these areas are separated by only a few metres.

The partly constructed wall is already causing large-scale tensions in the region, as it serves jointly as a border, military checkpoint and all-encompassing mass surveillance system.

These tensions are evident in the town of Qalqiliya, which has a population of 42,000. The town plays a vital role for some 45,000 surrounding villagers, who use its medical services, schools and shops.

Qalqiliya will be surrounded by the wall on three sides. The residents living nearest to the wall already have its intrusive cameras peering into their houses and rooms. It is only possible to enter and leave the town on foot via a one-metre-wide military checkpoint, whilst cars leave and enter via an entrance just five metres wide. Many people from the nearby village of Jayyous have been refused entrance into Qalqiliya. Other people have been detained for hours on end by the military guards at the checkpoint.

Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat has condemned the building of the wall. Earlier this month Arafat said, "Right now, the Israelis do whatever they want, and their sole aim is to strangle us. They are destroying us so that they are better able to start building a wall. The wall will be longer than 350 kilometres. The line followed by the wall cheats considerably with regard to the 'green line' which was established as a border in 1967."

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