



UNRWA Reports on the West Bank Barrier Case Study

July 2004

Qalqiliya: the villages of Izbat al-Tabib, Nabi Elyas and Isla



1. Introduction

The villages of Izbat al-Tabib, Nabi Elyas and Isla belong to the Qalqiliya Governorate and lie on the eastern ('Palestinian') side of the 'Barrier'. Many inhabitants of these villages used to work in Israel as labourers but since the beginning of the second *intifada* have not been granted permits to enter Israel, making farming their only source of income. With the completion of the Barrier most of their agricultural land is now in the 'seamzone'.

The isolation of the farmlands is the critical factor for the economic situation of the area and the subject of this case study. The social ties of the villages are with Azzun, on which they depend for services such as education and primary health care. These have not been affected by the Barrier.

In total, between Azzun and Qalqilya, 6,000 dunums lie under, or are isolated in the 'seamzone' between the Green Line and the Barrier.

The traditional farming lands of Izbat al-Tabib and Nabi Elyas lie north of the settler bypass Route 55 and are now west of the Barrier, south west of Jayyus. There is no gate in this immediate area, so the only possible entrances are the two Jayyus gates (North, number 25 and South, number 26) and the Zufin gate (number 27). However, even after a farmer has obtained a permit and accessed the 'seamzone', he must use dirt roads or go on foot, to reach his land which can be up to ten kilometres away. As a result, since the construction of the Barrier, the few people that have received permits for the gates (approximately one third of those that applied) have not been able to access their land, especially with agricultural machines. The land is now effectively abandoned.

The lands of Isla, now effectively lost, lie southwest of the village, between the Barrier and the Alfei Menashe settlement, north of Ras Atira village. The residents of Isla have seen settlers enter their farm lands beyond the Barrier.

Izbat al-Tabib and most of Nabi Elyas are in Area C which requires Israeli building permits. Isla is in Area B where the Palestinian Authority (PA) issues permits. The pine forest between Izbat al-Tabib and Nabi Elyas is public land under Palestinian control. In the past both the Jordanian and Israeli Authorities tried to transfer the refugee Bedouin families of nearby Arab Ramadin and Arab Abu Farda to this land. It appears that this idea is being considered again as the Bedouins have been recently informed from the IDF.

2. Izbat al-Tabib village



Tabib

This village lies just south of Route 55, east of Qalqilya. It has a population of 265 people, or 35 families, 95% of whom are registered refugees, who receive UNRWA rations in Azzun. They are descendents of one original family (of a doctor, *tabib* in Arabic) that had to flee in 1948 from the Herziliya area, now in Israel. The doctor had 125 dunums in

Above: One of the streets of Izbat al-

the area, so when he left Herziliya, he moved to this land, where his family grew over the years and acquired more land in the area. Most residents are farmers and five individuals work for the PA.

The village has approximately 300 dunums, 40% of its land, mainly olive trees and wheat, isolated on the other side of the Barrier. The inhabitants requested a gate to access their land. When the Barrier was being built, space was left for a

gate but then closed off. They have made a second appeal to the DCO but they have received no answer.

The village is not connected to the electricity, water or sewerage networks. It relies on an illegal connection to the nearby gas station generator for electricity. In April 2004 the Village Council received approval from the Israeli Authorities to connect to the water network (Mekorot). UNDP will finance the project.

The village is not recognised by Israel and therefore no official village plan exists, so no building permits have been granted since 1967. Only six buildings in the village, built before 1967 have permits, from the Jordanian authorities. There are 16 outstanding demolition orders for lack of building permits since the year 2000, out of a total of 40 structures in the village. The inhabitants have been unable to obtain building permits, including for a kindergarten, which USAID has offered to build.

On 17 July 2004 during a peaceful demonstration by local residents, foreign, Palestinian and Israeli activists, the IDF arrived in the village and the commander threatened to destroy all the homes on the main road, 'to protect the settlers' that use Route 55.

3. Nabi Elyas village

This village of 1,200 people, mostly farmers from the area (about 350 refugees), has lost 2,500 dunums of agricultural land (olive groves and greenhouses) since the founding of Alfei Menashe settlement. Part of the land was lost to the construction of the Barrier itself (north and south of the village), part is inaccessible because



Above: The road that connects Izbat al-Tabib and Nabi Elyas and Route 55 to the right

there is no gate close enough to reach lands isolated on the other side and another part was lost earlier, to the building of the settlement. The remaining village lands are located east of the Qalqilya DCO and north of Route 55 between the Zufin and Jayyus South gates. Some land lies south of the village and the Barrier, adjacent to the settlement.

The isolated land is closest to the Zufin gate, which only opened for Palestinians in June 2004. Although the IDF allows farmers to use the patrol road from Zufin gate, it is still a long distance to their lands, especially for those who do not own

their own means of transportation. The combination of all these difficulties has resulted in the villagers visiting their lands less and less. Farmers that have olive groves plan to visit only once a year for the harvest. Some land lies west of the Nabi Elyas gate, which does not open regularly.

About 1,500 dunums of land are left for Nabi Elyas residents, including 70-80 dunums of the built up area of the village itself. The residents now include people from Qalqilya who moved to the village because of the economic crisis in that town, to open shops on Route 55.

There is one well in Nabi Elyas used for drinking water and another one, which the Israeli authorities refuse to connect to the local network, thus obliging the inhabitants to buy water from Mekorot (the Israeli water authority) at the price of NIS2.38 per cubic metre. The Village Council owes a large sum of money to Israel because people cannot afford to pay their bills.

4. Isla village

The village has a population of about 850 people of whom 70 are refugees. Isla has lost land on three occasions:

- 500 dunums in 1980 when the Alfei Menashe settlement was built;
- 250 dunums in 1996 when the fence around the settlement was built;
- 35 dunums were lost to the construction of the Barrier in 2000 with 1,800 dunums isolated on the other side in 2003.

The villagers have replanted some of the uprooted trees from land lost to the Barrier, on land they still access. In total they calculate that 80% of their traditional land is lost. The Isla gate is now open three times a day; however only a third of those that applied have received permits.



Above: The Isla gate, replanted trees and Alfei Menashe in the background.

In total 3,000 dunums of land belonging to Isla, Azzun and Kufir Thulth have been confiscated for the expansion of Alfei Menashe: Givat Tal, which is considered by Israel a neighbourhood of Alfei Menashe, will consist of 1406 housing units.

5. Conclusion

The building of the Alfei Menashe settlement and the construction of the Barrier have resulted in extensive confiscation and isolation of land belonging to these agricultural communities. The fragmentation of the remaining accessible land makes it increasingly difficult for the farmers to cultivate it and isolation makes it more vulnerable to gradual incorporation into local settlements.

In Izbat al-Tabib in particular, which is inhabited in its entirety by UNRWA-registered refugees, the already basic living conditions may deteriorate if the pending demolition orders are executed or if the Bedouins from Arab Ramadin and Arab Abu Farda were to be transferred to the nearby pine forest, thus putting pressure on local resources.