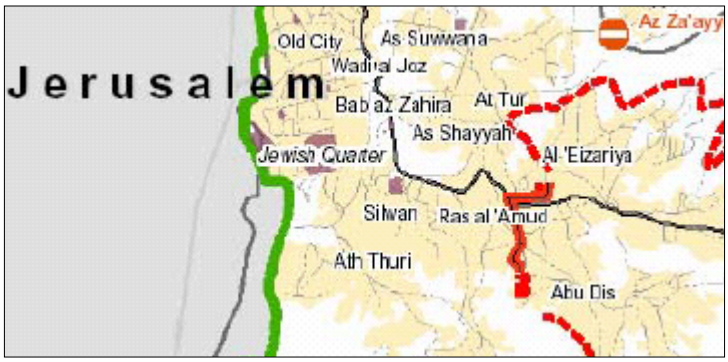
UNRWA
Profile

Reports on the West Bank Barrier

March 2004

Abu Dis, East Jerusalem



Abu Dis is located on the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem, approximately two kilometres from the Old City. The village lays between Al Eizariya in the North and Sawahira Al Sharqiya in the South. The Israeli settlement of Maale Adumin borders Abu Dis on the eastern side. Because of its proximity to Jerusalem, the importance of Abu Dis had greatly increased before the current *intifada*. Even the establishment of three checkpoints around the locality did not prevent --although certainly restricted and delayed-- access to, through or from Abu Dis over the past three years. In fact, almost all PA offices dealing with Jerusalem affairs and suburbs-related issues are located in Abu Dis. Furthermore, about 4,000 students receive their higher education at the Al Quds University campus in the village. In general, the local population (11,672) almost doubles for the daily influx of students and employees who commute from their place of residence. An average number of 150-200 Ford Transit services daily transport students to the University from different localities. Being on the only way which connects Ramallah and other northern towns with the southern West Bank, the local council chairperson estimates that 50,000 vehicles pass daily through Abu Dis, heading towards Bethlehem and Jericho.

Community	Abu Dis
Governorate	Jerusalem
Population	11,672 (PCBS, 2003). The local council chairman estimates that 10,000 additional people (students and employees) live in / commute to the village.
Refugees	1,100 person (250 families)
UNRWA	Education: there is one UNRWA Girls School, attended by 618 students, and where 21 teachers work. Health: all refugees in Abu Dis were used to receive their medical care in the UNRWA Jerusalem Health Centre.

	Relief: UNRWA offers emergency assistance to 220 families and 13 special hardship cases (28 persons).
INGO assistance	UAE Red Crescent Society
Other assistance	EU; PECDAR; Islamic Waqf
Contact persons	Local Council chairperson: Naem Aiad Ministry of Local Governance: Khaled Al Azzeh

Access/ Permits/ Gate issues

Access

Construction of the barrier in Abu Dis started in mid-2003. Originally concrete blocks were placed in the locality, which people still managed to squeeze through or climb with ladders. At the early stages of barrier construction, the time needed to reach Jerusalem from Abu Dis increased from 10 minutes to more than one hour. Still, Palestinians managed to 'infiltrate' in Jerusalem.

Abu Dis barrier, October 2003

The work has been fast advancing over the past five months, and a massive structure more than eight meters high has been completed over 80 percent of the projected route in the village. The barrier separates Abu Dis from Jerusalem, and divides approximately 35 families whose relatives reside on the other side of the barrier. Ten of these families hold West Bank IDs, though their house is on the westside of the barrier. It is still unclear whether they will be granted Jerusalem identification documents, or will have to move eastside of the barrier, 'in the West Bank'. In addition, the Sawahira Al Sharqiya cemetery will be located westside of the barrier, i.e. on the Jerusalem side, making access difficult for residents of Abu Dis, Al Eizariya and Sawahira Al Sharqiya.

Abu Dis barrier, January 2004

Permits

Prior to construction of the barrier and up to now, Abu Dis residents were required to hold two permits: one enabling them to enter Jerusalem, and another allowing them to travel through the West Bank (checkpoint permit). The future evolution of the permits policy is not clear yet.

Gates

Nothing official has been communicated to the local authorities about the location of any gate in Abu Dis, or its opening times. At this stage, no gate-site can be identified in the completed section of the barrier.

Education

The UNRWA Girls School in Abu Dis is attended by 618 students, most of whom reside in the locality. At present, four of them are being affected by construction of the barrier in their route to school. The transfer of 15 refugee students to PA schools that are located in more easily accessible sites has been reported.

Six of the 21 UNRWA teachers working at the school are coming from outside the village and affected by construction of the barrier in their daily journey. Beyond logistical problems of access, and consequent loss of school days, proximity to the barrier site is likely to have a psychologically disruptive effect on all students and teachers alike. This is obviously affecting both UNRWA and PA schools in Abu Dis (elementary and secondary), where more than 60 refugee students are also enrolled.

The UNRWA Psychosocial Support Programme envisages that specific conditions related to perceptions of imprisonment or 'encagement' are likely to emerge in the short-term, and especially in younger generations. According to specialised literature on the topic, isolating communities in a place against their will inhibits development of the psychological and creative functions of its members. Resulting conditions may be behavioural disturbances, including impaired capacity of judgement, integrating with others and regulating emotions. The 'ghetto' condition is internalised, therefore psychological and social instability continue even after elimination of the physical obstacles, or after moving out of the secluded place.

The Al Quds University in Abu Dis will also be seriously affected by the barrier construction. The increased costs of transportation to Abu Dis (*see below 'Socio-economic issues'*) will make attendance unaffordable to students. No details are available at the University on the place of residence or refugee status of the students. However, the great majority of them are not Abu Dis residents, therefore they will probably opt for enrolment in more easy-to-reach educational institutions.

Health

All refugees resident in Abu Dis used to report to the UNRWA Health Centre in the Old City of Jerusalem for health care. Sixty percent of refugee patients treated at the Centre used to come from outside Jerusalem, i.e. mainly from Abu Dis, El Eizaryia and surrounding areas in the Jerusalem governorate. Over the period August-October 2003 (when the Abu Dis barrier was still made of concrete blocks and people somehow managed to overcome it) a total number of 19,095 generic visits; 5,101 pediatric visits; 1,650 pre-natal and family planning visits; and 1,802 dental treatments were completed at the Centre. In Autumn 2003, a number of refugees were also injured falling or slipping from the barrier while attempting to climb it,

and reported to the Jerusalem Health Centre for treatment. In addition to patients access problems to the Centre, smooth completion of medical procedures is also impaired by difficulties and delays experienced by UNRWA health professional themselves. The head doctor, a nurse, the

laboratory technician and the pharmacist of the Jerusalem Health Centre reside in Abu Dis and surrounding areas, and need to overcome the barrier in order to reach their work place.

The barrier facing Al Quds University campus

No alternative is available to refugee patients and the general Abu Dis population. The two health centres present in the locality are both private. So is the clinic in El Eizaryia, which is also too small to accommodate all those who need treatment from the various villages and localities, now isolated from Jerusalem. At the moment no mobile clinic visits Abu Dis. However, the local council offers one of its vacant rooms for medical visits performed by health professionals from Al Quds University on a weekly basis. Also a room is made available for a veterinary clinic once a week.

Serious medical cases now need to be transferred to Ramallah, and local authorities hope that international aid could assist in the purchase of an ambulance for the village. The isolation of Abu Dis from Jerusalem makes emergency aid slow and difficult. In Autumn 2003, a local resident aged 45 suffering from a heart attack could not be treated in time. The ambulance had to take a long route to circumvent the barrier and when it arrived, the patient had already died.

Ras Kubsa taxi station in foreground

The presence of the barrier also results in an increased number of military measures adopted by soldiers guarding the site, e.g. the use of tear gas. In November 2003, a 23 year old refugee woman from Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza was involved in one of these attacks. Hind Suloman Shrateha was a 5th year medical student at Al Quds University. It is reported that, while she was waiting for a cab at Ras Kubsa taxi station, soldiers started randomly throwing tear gas bombs onto the eastern side of the barrier. The student inhaled the gas, which badly affected her chronic heart condition. Allegedly on the grounds of her Gaza origins, emergency aid was stopped for approximately 30 minutes. The Israeli patrol eventually called an Israeli ambulance that transferred her to Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem. She remained there in coma for 17 days and died on 2 December 2003.

Socio-economic issues

The Abu Dis community used to enjoy a relatively comfortable economic situation. The local authority reports that only 10 percent of village dwellers are poor or on the verge of poverty, whereas the great majority of the population can be classified as moderately well-off (80 percent) or rich (10 percent). Now the community generally feels helpless and disillusioned, despite the numerous visits of activists and international organisations to the barrier site. Some internal tension was felt in the community, when Israeli contractors working on the barrier started hiring workers from the Hebron area. They were requested to work at night for NIS 500 per night, according to local rumours . The local authority reports that youth activists chased them and forced them to leave the job. In addition, local activists sometimes attempt to slow down advancement in the construction work, e.g. by the occasional burning of or damage to construction machines.

In terms of economic issues, construction of the barrier is resulting in a marked impoverishment of Abu Dis. Jerusalem residents used to visit and shop in the village, where commodity prices were generally cheaper than in downtown Jerusalem. Local shops depended on Jerusalem clients up to 60 percent of their monthly income. An enhancement in commercial activities also resulted from the influx of employees, students and commuters in general. In addition, renting houses to students had become an important source of income to Abu Dis residents. Consequently, the price of land in Abu Dis had been increasing as high as JD40,000 per dunum until April 2003.

Area of former economic activity.

Construction of the barrier dramatically reversed this trend. Land has depreciated by 60 percent and people are starting to move out. As of January 2004, the local authority reports that approximately 1,000 people have moved or have applied for residence transfer. Those who can, try to move to Jerusalem, although there they can only afford to live in overcrowded and poor conditions. Others plan to move to Bethlehem.

Shops are closing down and unemployment rates are strongly increasing. House rents have decreased by 30 percent and residents expect that students will no longer enrol in Al Quds University because of the difficulties resulting from the barrier. The cost of public transport from Abu Dis to Damascus Gate in Jerusalem has increased from NIS1-1.5 to NIS 7; the taxi fare has raised from NIS2.5 to NIS10.

The local authority also reports that 90 percent of the land which has been confiscated to allow construction of the barrier (800 dunums) was agricultural land. However, so far, no major change has been recorded in the price of agricultural produce sold in the village. Many Abu Dis residents raise livestock and grazing land is also becoming scarce, as the village is now wedged between the barrier and Maale Adumim settlement. At present, approximately 50 residents own more than 20 farm animals and two people own more than 300. However, 90 percent of butchers strongly relied on Jerusalem customers, so are now experiencing difficulties in marketing their meat.

It is expected that service networks will still be operational for Abu Dis residents, e.g. with electrical wires being raised above the barrier. However, delays in maintenance and repair are envisaged, because of the longer routes that service providers would have to take in order to reach the village. There has already been an instance of such problems in early January when Jerusalem fire workers were not able to reach a house going on fire in Abu Dis. As highlighted above (‘*Health’ section*), adequate and timely health care is also going to be strongly affected by the barrier. Garbage disposal may become a problem for neighbourhoods located west of the barrier, as they were benefitting from the recycling factory in Abu Dis.