



Farming Injustice

International trade with Israeli agricultural companies and the destruction of Palestinian farming

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February 2013

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Palestinian Farmers Union
Palestinian NGO Network
Popular Struggle Coordination Committee
Stop the Wall
Union of Agricultural Work Committees
Union of Palestinian Agriculture Engineers

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Cover photo: *In May 2009 Israeli troops set fire to Palestinian crops along Gaza's border with Israel. More than 200,000 square metres of crops were destroyed, including wheat and barley ready for harvest, as well as vegetables, olive and pomegranate trees.* Photo: Eva Bartlett

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Ryan Rodrick Beller/Activestills

Introduction

For Palestinians, agriculture is much more than the production of olives, citrus fruit and other fresh produce or keeping livestock. Farming is tied to the Palestinian people's identity, history and resistance to Israel's illegal occupation.

Top: With Israeli settlements on a nearby hilltop, a resident of Al-Walaja picks olives in groves that will be cut off from his home once the Israeli apartheid wall completely surrounds the town as planned

On February 9 2013, 17 Palestinian organisations appealed to international civil society to launch campaigns to end trade in produce from illegal Israeli settlements with Israeli agricultural companies, which play a key role in the on-going destruction of Palestinian agriculture, dispossession of Palestinian farmers and theft of natural resources.

“We, Palestinian organisations and unions representing farmers struggling for their right to their land and to food sovereignty, urge international civil society organisations to build effective campaigns and work towards ending agricultural trade with Israel that finances and rewards the destruction of Palestinian farming,” the call begins. The call to action is reproduced in full at the end of this briefing.

Action to end international complicity with the destruction of Palestinian agriculture can be a vital contribution towards the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality and to the Palestinian right to food sovereignty and access to land.

This briefing aims to shed light on the systematic destruction of Palestinian agriculture by Israel and the complicity of Israeli agricultural companies in this destruction.

Palestinian farmers face the brunt of Israel's land confiscations, demolitions and water theft. Farmers that still have access to land and water face systematically implemented restrictions and violence. The siege of Gaza prevents farmers from accessing basic equipment and has made exports of fresh produce almost impossible. Farmers and fishermen regularly come under attack from the Israeli military. Many of these actions constitute violations of international law.

An estimated 10% of the Palestinian GDP (\$480 million) and 110,000 jobs are lost annually because of the negative effect of Israeli policies on Palestinian agriculture in the occupied Palestinian territory.¹

Israeli agricultural export companies such as Mehadrin and Hadiklaim are among the primary beneficiaries of the destruction of Palestinian agriculture. These companies operate inside and export produce from illegal settlements using stolen Palestinian land and water and profit from the siege on Gaza.

International trade with Israeli agricultural export companies finances the expansion of illegal settlements and rewards them for their participation in violations of international law.

A number of governments and retailers have already taken action in response to civil society pressure, but much more needs to be done to end trade with Israeli agricultural companies complicit in Israel's violations of international law.

Food sovereignty

Palestinian farming organisations increasingly see their struggle to remain on their land and resist Israel's colonisation and restrictions on Palestinian agriculture as part of a wider global struggle for food sovereignty.

Decisions about how the food system works, what gets produced and how it is traded are made by large agricultural businesses, retailers and governments of powerful states. This is the primary reason that in 2009, for the first time in human history, more than a billion people were classified as living in hunger.

As the global food system has been reshaped in the interests of private profit, millions of small-scale farmers and indigenous people have been forced from their lands or had their way of life turned upside down.

Food sovereignty provides an alternative and has been defined by international peasants movement Via Campesina as follows:

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets; and to provide local fisheries based communities the priority in managing the use of and the rights to aquatic resources. Food sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather, it promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production.



Eva Bartlett

1. Agriculture in Gaza

Around 1.8 million Palestinians - two thirds of who are refugees - live in a strip of land that is just 40km long and 9km wide, making Gaza one of the most densely populated areas in the world.

Gaza is blockaded by the Israeli military and cut off from the outside world through physical barriers and a stringent regime of restrictions on movement of both people and goods. Even British prime minister David Cameron has called the occupied and besieged Gaza Strip a “prison camp.”² A UN report has warned that Gaza will not be “liveable” by 2020 barring urgent action.³

In 2008-09, Israel launched a 23-day assault on Gaza that killed more than 1,400 Palestinians. The United Nations and leading human rights organisations accused Israel of deliberately targeting civilians, using banned weapons and committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. Restrictions on the movement of essential goods have severely hampered the ability of Palestinians in Gaza to rebuild damaged infrastructure. Israel launched another major attack on Gaza in November 2012 in which more than 150 Palestinians were killed.⁴

Israel’s repeated military offensives against Gaza and its years-old siege have led to a dramatic fall in the number of Palestinians employed in the agricultural sector there, reduced production and incomes for Palestinian farmers and left 80% of Palestinians in Gaza dependent on food aid.⁵

Israel's siege

Israel's siege on Gaza has almost completely destroyed Palestinian agriculture. Israel has routinely prevented essential items such as components for irrigation systems and fishing nets from being imported into Gaza. Farmers in Gaza are on the whole prevented from exporting fresh produce. Only 148 truckloads of human food related exports were allowed out of Gaza in the whole of 2012.⁶ The volume of exports from Gaza is still less than 2% of the pre-2007 levels.⁷ Each year, tons of strawberries and other fresh produce are left to rot while waiting in vain at the Israeli border.

The destruction of Palestinian livelihoods and the denial of supply of essential goods to Gaza's farmers are tools consciously used by Israeli policy makers. A senior Israeli official described Israel's policy in Gaza saying "the idea" is to "put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger." The Israeli government calculated the minimum number of calories needed by Gaza's 1.5 million inhabitants to avoid malnutrition and these figures were then used to determine the quantity of food that was allowed in each day.⁸

Israel's regular attacks on Gaza cause huge damage to Palestinian farmland, crops and agricultural buildings. Following Israel's 2008-09 attack on Gaza, a total of 46% of agricultural land in the Gaza Strip was estimated to be inaccessible or out of production.⁹ Residue from phosphorous and artillery shells seriously impact the quality of the food that farmers are able to produce and have impacts on health.¹⁰ Following the November 2012 attack, the Ministry of Agriculture in Gaza estimated that the agricultural sector incurred losses totalling US\$21 million.¹¹

'Buffer zones'

The Israeli military has imposed a 'buffer zone' that serves as a no-go area that extends along the entire northern and eastern perimeter of the Gaza Strip, inside Palestinian territory. Palestinians that enter these areas routinely come under fire, including from remotely controlled weapon systems (see map p.26).

In 2011, the Israeli military killed 24 Palestinians, including 5 children, and injured 205 people in the border buffer zones.¹² Defence for Children International reports that the Israeli military shot 30 children collecting gravel in the border areas between March 2010 and December 2011.¹³

Main photo: Farm workers collect the harvest near the border fence, where they risk coming under fire from Israeli troops.

Right: A Palestinian man during a weekly march to the buffer zone near Beit Hanoun. Farmers have been forced to abandon their land near the border due to regular Israeli gunfire and much of the area has become a wasteland.



Anne Paq/Activestills

Attacks on farmers in the Buffer Zones

Palestinian farmers and farm labourers come under regular attack from the Israeli military and these attacks have continued even in spite of the November 2012 ceasefire agreement.

One morning in late January 2013, a small group of farm labourers were tending olive and lemon trees near the buffer zone. Farm labourers report seeing two Israeli military jeeps stop at the border fence, so they left their work fearing that the soldiers may open fire.

Initially relieved when the jeeps drove away, the labourers soon noticed that the jeeps had left two soldiers behind that were wearing foliage as camouflage. The soldiers opened fire and shot 21-year-old Mamdouh Al-Kafarna in his legs. As he fell, Mamdouh saw the soldiers cross to the Palestinian side of the fence and enter the Gaza Strip a short distance. At the sight of them running towards him, Mamdouh was afraid they might abduct or even kill him and tried desperately to scramble away.

Amazingly, Mamdouh managed to get to safety and was eventually transferred to Beit Hanoun Hospital. Mamdouh is the eldest son in his family and only he and his father have work, supporting 20 people at home. Many others are not so lucky.²¹



A farmer surveys the damage after Israeli bulldozers level his farm. Regular Israeli incursions destroy farm buildings and crops and kill livestock.

The precise areas designated by Israel as part of the buffer zone are unknown, causing great uncertainty. Letters dropped during the 2008-09 attack on Gaza stated it was 300m from the border but in effect the zone extends up to 2km from the border of the Gaza Strip, which is as narrow as 5km in places.

Between 30% and 40% of Gaza's farmland is located in the buffer zones.¹⁴ Most of the farmland within 300m of the border has been completely abandoned. The area was previously used to grow fruit, olive and nut trees and a variety of vegetables.

Many Palestinian farmers continue to tend to farmland in parts of the buffer zones despite the huge risk of death or serious injury. The Israeli military has demolished more than 150 water wells in the restricted areas since 2005 and routinely destroy any crop taller than 80cm, forcing many

farmers to grow basic and less profitable crops such as barley or wheat.¹⁵ A UN OCHA report has estimated that lost agricultural output in the buffer zones totals 75,000 tons per year, representing lost income of more than US\$50 million.¹⁶

Israel carries out methodical demolitions of Palestinian farms in the buffer zone. Military convoys of trucks, troops and bulldozers enter Gaza, level Palestinian farms and uproot fruit trees as part of frequent incursions, often supported by military helicopters or drones. More than 2,000 buildings were destroyed between 2005 and 2010.¹⁷

As part of the November 2012 ceasefire agreement, Israel agreed to lift the land buffer zone. However, four Palestinians were killed and 75 Palestinians, including 14 children, were wounded by Israeli gunfire in the buffer zones in the two months following the ceasefire.¹⁸

Fishing

Israel has also implemented a naval buffer zone. Despite the Oslo Accords stating that Palestinians have the right to fish up to 20 nautical miles off Gaza's coast, Israel imposed a three-mile limit in June 2007.¹⁹ Because they are forced to fish in such shallow waters, Palestinian fishermen can only catch mainly small fish that have been contaminated by the output of inadequate sewage treatment facilities.

Even within this restricted area, fishermen face arrest and regular attacks from the Israeli navy including gunfire, shelling, and the ramming of boats. Between May 2009 and November 2010, Israel carried out 53 attacks on fishermen, resulting in two deaths, and arrested 42 fishermen.²⁰

The Israeli military often orders fishermen to strip to their undergarments, jump into the water and swim towards Israel gunboats, where they are handcuffed and blindfolded and sometimes beaten.

Sabotage and the damage and confiscation of nets and boats by the Israeli navy are commonplace. Many boats now sit idle due to damage and the high risks involved in fishing off Gaza's coast. Despite the sea being Gaza's best potential resource, its 4,000 fishermen are one its poorest groups.

The November 2012 ceasefire agreement supposedly increased the fishing area to six nautical miles. However, the Israeli military has regularly arrested and attacked fishermen operating in this new 6-mile area.

Fishing under fire

Attacks on Palestinian fishermen intensified following the November 2012 attack on Gaza and subsequent ceasefire.

Dozens of fishermen were arrested and at least nine boats were impounded and one destroyed in the week following the ceasefire agreement. Fishermen came under fire from Israeli gunboats within the newly announced six-mile limit and even the within the pre-existing three-mile limit.

Khadr Bakr, 20 years old, was arrested from his boat on Wednesday, 28 November. He is the only breadwinner in his family of ten, which consists of his parents and eight children. Khadr was fishing with three other people when the Israeli navy appeared and began firing at his ship. He was only three-and-a-half miles from the shore. Four large Israeli gunboats began firing at the fishing boat from a range of about five meters. They ordered the fishermen to take off their clothes and jump in the water. After they jumped in, they continued to fire at the boat until it caught fire and the outboard engine exploded. They also shot around Khadr while he was in the water. "I thought they were going to kill me while I was in the water" he said later in an interview. The other three fishermen were able to escape with help from another fishing boat, but Khadr was taken aboard, where he was handcuffed and blindfolded. He was held like that for three hours, while the captain of the gunboat kicked him.²²



Anne Paq/Activestills

Palestinian fishermen come under regular attack and have seen a dramatic decrease in income. Many have been forced to stop fishing



2. Agriculture in the West Bank

Israel began its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967. The colonisation of the West Bank started shortly after and continues to the present day. There are now more than 650,000 Israeli settlers living in more than 200 illegal settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.²³

All Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law and their construction amounts to a war crime. The prohibition on deporting or transferring parts of a State's own civilian population into the territory it occupies is set forth in the Fourth Geneva Convention.²⁴ It is a grave breach of Additional Protocol I.²⁵ Under the Statute of the International Criminal Court, "the transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies" constitutes a war crime in international armed conflicts."²⁶

Under Israeli law, Israeli settlers live under Israeli civilian rule, while the 2.7 million Palestinians living in the West Bank are subject to repressive military law. Nearly half of the land in the West Bank is now off-limits to Palestinians.

The majority of agricultural land in occupied Palestinian territory is in the West Bank. Palestinian farmers face the brunt of Israel's land confiscations, demolitions and theft of water. Farmers that still have access to land and water face systematically implemented restrictions and violence.

Dispossession and displacement

Israeli policies in the West Bank aim to concentrate the Palestinian population into isolated Bantustans and facilitate the continued expansion of illegal settlements. Palestinian farmers are forcibly displaced from their land in order to make way for illegal settlements.

Israel is constructing an apartheid wall surrounding the West Bank that is designed to entrench the annexation of East Jerusalem, further isolate the West Bank and facilitate the confiscation of Palestinian land. More than 85% of Israel's wall is illegally built on occupied Palestinian land, and its construction has resulted in further land confiscation and left many Palestinians trapped between the wall and the Israel-West Bank border or unable to access their land.²⁷

Nearly 63% of agricultural land in the West Bank is located in Area C, a formal military zone controlled solely by Israel in which Israel prevents Palestinian construction and carries out the majority of its demolitions and land confiscations. In 2012, Israel destroyed 599 structures in Area C, including houses and farming structures, and more than 4,000 Palestinians were affected by demolitions.²⁸

As the area of land available for farming shrinks, Palestinians that would have otherwise worked in agriculture are forced to move to urban areas to look for work, which over time reduces the size of farming communities and the number of Palestinians with farming knowledge and experience.

Olive trees play an especially important role in the Palestinian economy and Palestinian identity in general. Israel is only too aware of this; the Israeli military and fanatic settlers have between them uprooted, burnt and destroyed nearly 1.5 million olive trees since 2001.²⁹

Movement restrictions

Farmers are often separated from their lands by Israel's apartheid wall or other barriers and are only granted access by the occupation authorities to their land infrequently or sometimes not at all. Even where access is granted, farmers are often prevented from taking tractors, machinery and other tools onto their land. There are reports of Palestinian farmers being prevented from accessing their land to extinguish fires destroying their crops, including when Israeli settlers have set the fires deliberately.

Checkpoints and entry restrictions prevent workers from accessing the farmland at which they work, prevent agricultural produce from reaching local markets, increase transport costs, and often cause produce to rot while stuck in transit.

Main photo: Top: *Palestinians are regularly harassed and attacked by soldiers and settlers on their agricultural lands, especially during the harvest. International and Israeli activists join the villagers at this time to help with the crops.*

Right: *Agricultural gates form part of the apartheid wall separating farmers from their lands across the West Bank. The gates are monitored by Israeli soldiers and open for one hour in the early morning and one hour in the late afternoon. Only Palestinians with permits are allowed to pass through to access their land.*



Oren Ziv/Activestills

Jordan Valley

The Jordan Valley area is about 2,400 km², lying in the east of the West Bank and accounting for 28.5% of its area. With its favourable climate, fertile land and plentiful water supply, the Jordan Valley is the main agricultural area in the West Bank and the whole of the occupied Palestinian territories.

These characteristics make the Jordan Valley, most of which is in Area C, highly attractive to Israel. Colonisation began in 1968 with the construction of three settlements. There are now more than 9,000 settlers living in 36 settlements that cover more than half of the Jordan Valley.⁴¹ 94% of the Jordan Valley is under direct Israeli control.⁴² Israel regularly announces new demolition orders and settlement expansion plans in the Jordan Valley and has discussed plans to increase the size of agricultural settlements in the Jordan Valley by 130%.⁴³

Farming communities in the Jordan Valley are resisting colonisation and face a daily struggle to stay on their land. Settlers are provided with generous benefits and funding while Palestinian

communities are almost entirely forbidden from building and demolitions are commonplace. Israel imposes strict movement restrictions and dominates the water supply. Israeli settlers, with a tremendous advantage in water accessibility, control over 13 times as much irrigated land as Palestinians in the Jordan Valley.⁴⁴

Israeli agricultural companies operating in the Jordan Valley illegally use much of the confiscated land and water for production and many of the settlements are heavily dependent on international exports .



Export of Palestinian agricultural produce must be carried out in cooperation with Israeli agencies and sometimes also with Israeli companies. Israel creates various obstacles to ensure exports are kept to a minimum. Delays and unfairly administered inspection procedures at export terminals reduce quality and significantly add to costs. There is evidence of testing procedures being implemented especially harshly when it suits the needs of Israeli markets or to punish farmers at times of heightened political tension.³⁰ A ban on the importation of fertilisers is estimated to have caused a 20-33% decline in agricultural productivity.³¹

In addition, Israel and Israeli agricultural export companies undermine Palestinian production by dumping cheap Israeli produce into the Palestinian market, including at times when local Palestinian production is at its peak. Trucks carrying Israeli imports are often allowed into the West Bank without any checks.³²

Water apartheid

The West Bank is very rich in water resources, but Israel illegally controls all sources of water in the West Bank, including the Jordan River, and extracts almost 90 per cent of the yearly sustainable water yield from its rich aquifers, leaving Palestinian farmers with a trickle.³³ Amnesty International has accused Israel of depriving Palestinians of their access to water “as a means of expulsion”.³⁴

In 1967, there were 774 operational wells in the West Bank, while in 2005 only 328 functioning wells remained.³⁵ Approximately 313,000 Palestinians in the West Bank have inadequate access to water.³⁶ Israeli settlements are connected to a high-pressure water network serviced by appropriated and illegally constructed wells in occupied Palestinian territory.

The lack of adequate water supply puts farmers at the mercy of weather patterns, causing reduced yields and forcing farmers to grow far less valuable crops that can rely on rainwater alone. In other cases, Israeli over-extraction has changed the salinity of the water, making it unusable for irrigation.

In addition, Israeli settlements, normally located on the top of hills above Palestinian communities, allow their sewage water and waste to flow into Palestinian areas, causing pollution of the underground water, health impacts and crop damage.³⁷

Left: Parched water source in the Jordan Valley. Water is stolen for the use of illegal settlements and Israeli settlers control over 13 times as much irrigated land as Palestinians in the Jordan Valley.

Right: Soldiers prevent a farmer from Marda accessing his land during a demonstration against the construction of the apartheid wall.

Violence

Palestinian farmers face serious violence and harassment from soldiers and fanatic Israeli settlers as they tend to their crops or collect the annual harvest of olives and other fruits.

The number of settler attacks resulting in Palestinian casualties and property damage is currently rising sharply and increased by 32% in 2011 compared to 2010, and by over 144% compared to 2009.³⁸ Settlers also burn crops and destroy olive trees, with more than 10,000 olive trees destroyed or damaged by settlers in 2011 alone.³⁹ Settlers rarely face criminal charges for attacks on Palestinians. These crimes are committed with near total impunity and with protection from the occupation forces.⁴⁰

Farming in Hableh

Hableh is a small town of 7,000 inhabitants in the Qalqilia district in the north of the West Bank that is almost completely surrounded by Israel's wall.

Ibrahim, 62, owns 26 dunums of land (1 dunum = 1,000 square meters) planted with orange and lemon trees and used to own four greenhouses. Ibrahim is now separated from his land by Israel's apartheid wall and his greenhouses have been completely destroyed.

"My sons used to help me farm the land and operate the Artesian well but now they can't get permits to pass through the wall," Ibrahim explains.

"Despite all the difficulties I go almost every day to my land. The gate opens between 7am and 8am and opens again for one hour at 4pm. Many of my trees died because I can't take care of them alone. Israel also destroyed our well, so now I am forced to buy water from the Israeli national water company Mekorot, which increases the cost of farming the land."

"They want to push us to surrender and leave our land for settlers, but we understand what they are trying to do and we will never leave our land," he said.



Yotam Ronen/Activestills



3. International trade with Israeli companies

Israeli agricultural companies such as Mehadrin and Hadiklaim participate in the colonisation of Palestinian land and resources and profit from the on-going siege on Gaza. They are among the primary beneficiaries of the destruction of Palestinian agriculture.

Israeli companies export fruits and vegetables including dates, citrus fruits, avocados, potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes and fresh herbs to markets all over the world including Europe, Asia and South Africa. In Europe, many major supermarkets have supply contracts with complicit Israeli companies or their wholly owned European subsidiaries. In 2010, Israel exported fruit and vegetables worth US\$2.1 billion, 66% of which was to European markets.⁴⁶

This trade finances the continued existence and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory and the colonisation of Palestinian land and resources. It also rewards Israeli agricultural export companies for their role in Israeli violations of international law.

Financing colonisation

Israeli agricultural companies operate farms and packing houses in illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, especially in the fertile Jordan Valley, and export settlement produce to international markets. Companies such as Hadiklaim, Mehadrin and Hashtil operate farms and administer the whole export process, while others such as EDOM and AdaFresh have packing houses in illegal settlements and manage the export of produce grown in illegal settlements. Israeli agriculture companies operating in settlements benefit from access to government subsidies and to cheap land, water and Palestinian labour.

By operating in illegal Israeli settlements, Israeli companies help to secure Israel's grip on occupied territory. Water-intensive production in illegal settlements makes use of stolen Palestinian water in its intensive production processes; one company, Mehadrin, even has a formal arrangement with the Israeli state water company Mekorot and directly participates in the appropriation of Palestinian water.⁴⁷ In the Jordan Valley, Israel has granted almost exclusive use of water to settlements.

Estimates of the proportion of total Israeli exports that are from Israeli settlements vary from 2% to 33%, with the higher figures including goods partially

produced in settlements.⁴⁸ Estimates towards the higher end of the range seem reasonable when it is considered that 8.4% of the Israeli population resides in illegal settlements and that government investment in settlement businesses is consistently higher than in Israel and can as high as 22% of the total budget for business investment.⁴⁹

Figures based on the available data show that produce grown in illegal settlements constitutes a large proportion of total agricultural exports and provide substantial revenue to illegal settlements:

- About 70% of the grapes produced by Israeli settlements in the occupied Jordan Valley are exported, making up approximately half of all the grapes exported by Israel.⁵⁰
- 40% of the dates grown in Israel in 2011 were exported, generating a profit of US\$265 million for Israeli export companies. Jordan Valley settlements grow 40% of the exported dates.⁵¹
- Herbs for export are primarily grown in the occupied Jordan Valley. 80% of Israel's herbs are exported to Europe, mainly France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Scandinavia.⁵²

International trade with companies operating in settlements dramatically improves the economic viability of settlements, consolidating the settlements and providing a substantial revenue stream to private settlers and settlement municipal authorities.

Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights and ensure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses. [They] should not breach international humanitarian law provisions. Nor should they be complicit in any breaches. If they do, they may be subject to criminal or civil liability. And this liability can be extended to individual employees of such businesses.

Richard Falk, UN Special Rapporteur⁴⁵

Main photo: Greenhouses and other buildings in a fenced off illegal settlement called Ro'i in the Jordan Valley, built on stolen Palestinian land close to Palestinian Bedouin communities such as Al Hadidya and Ras-Al Ahmar.

According to settlement authorities in the Jordan Valley, “about 30 per cent of the [Israeli settlements] are economically based directly on agriculture and an additional 30 per cent give agriculture related services – packing houses, refrigeration, transport, office services, etc.” Jordan Valley settlements produce an estimated 500m NIS (US\$128m) of fresh produce each year.⁵³ Many Jordan Valley settlements rely on agricultural production, and the existence of many settlements would be under threat if they were no longer to export their produce.⁵⁴

It is well understood that an international market for settlement produce exists and produce from settlements can reach international markets in ten hours.⁵⁵ This creates a powerful incentive for settlement expansion and the establishment of new settlements.

Any trade with companies operating in or involved in illegal Israeli settlements supports the continued existence of settlements. Trade with such companies provides them with capital that can be used to invest in the expansion of their operations in settlements. The continued existence of trade with companies operating in illegal settlements provides settlements with de facto recognition and political legitimacy.

Exports of agricultural produce grown inside Israel using water illegally requisitioned from the occupied Palestinian territory also contributes to the colonisation of Palestinian land and the severe water shortages faced by Palestinian farmers.

Supporting the siege on Gaza

Israel has decimated agricultural production in Gaza. Many of the main Israeli agriculture companies are able to dump produce deemed unsuitable for international export into the Gazan market, further undermining local Palestinian production. Israeli agricultural export companies also benefit from the loss in direct competition caused by the destruction of agricultural production in Gaza. International trade with Israeli agricultural export companies continues despite the way in which these companies benefit from and are complicit with Israel’s siege on Gaza.

Exploiting Palestinian farmers

Israeli agricultural companies exploit their relationship with the Israeli state and the destruction of Palestinian agriculture. Palestinian producers are sometimes left with no option but to export through Israeli export companies, who sometimes label Palestinian produce as ‘Made in Israel’. Palestinian farmers have consistently rejected the suggestion that this exploitation should serve as a reason for inaction in the face of the illegal actions of Israeli agricultural companies.

Israeli agricultural companies also undermine Palestinian production by dumping produce into the Palestinian market at times of peak Palestinian production.⁵⁶



Left: A woman sifts through the ruins of her home after a demolition in the Bedouin community of Al Hadidye that left 32 people homeless. Agricultural export company Mehadrin operates in the nearby Beqa’ot and Ro’i settlements.

Main photo right: Palestinian youth working under precarious conditions and for less than the minimum wage on plantations in the illegal Israeli settlement of Ma’ale Efrayim, Jordan Valley. Palestinians are often left with no choice but to work in settlements built on land stolen from their families.



Exploiting Palestinian labour

Loss of sources of income and high unemployment leaves many Palestinians with no option but to work for Israeli agricultural companies in illegal Israeli settlements, including in those established on land from which they and their families have been forcibly displaced.

Palestinian workers in illegal settlements earn, on average, less than half the minimum wage stipulated by Israeli law, and most do not receive benefits. Working environments are often highly dangerous, and accidents and injuries are commonplace since settlement employers do not respect safety standards when it comes to Palestinian workers.⁷¹

As many as 1,000 Palestinian children are employed in Israeli settlements at any one time, working in similarly dangerous and exploitative conditions as their adult counterparts.⁷² Children as young as 11 years old have been found working adult shifts in fruit picking fields in illegal settlements.⁷³

Palestinians in packing houses in Beqa'ot, a settlement in which Mehadrin packing houses operate, told researchers that they are paid just 56 NIS (\$15) per day, 35% of the legally required minimum wage, and receive no pay slips or benefits for their work.⁷⁴

COMPANY PROFILES

Mehadrin⁵⁷

One of Israel's largest agricultural export companies, Mehadrin (MTEX) exports produce from illegal settlements, including Beqa'ot and Ro'i and settlements surrounding the Palestinian village of Al-Jiftlik. Mehadrin packaging found in settlements was marked 'Made in Israel'.

Signage bearing Mehadrin logos have been found on packing houses inside settlements and on fencing around the Massua settlement close to the Palestinian community of Abu Al Ajaj in the Jordan Valley. Mehadrin boasts that it grows most of the produce it exports and it seems that Mehadrin is directly operating farms in illegal settlements.

Mehadrin also collaborates with Mekorot, the Israeli state water company, to supply water to its farmers and thus participates in the appropriation of Palestinian water. Workers in Mehadrin packing houses have spoken of grossly exploitative working conditions.



Mehadrin logo in Hebrew on a building in the settlement of Beqa'ot

The company exports a wide range of fresh produce, is a lead supplier of Jaffa branded fruit and has subsidiaries in the UK, Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden, France and the USA. Mehadrin took over a large number of Agrexco's clients when it collapsed in 2011.

Mehadrin's impact on Al-Hadidiye

Prior to 1967, more than 100 families inhabited the village of Al-Hadidiye, which is located near Tubas in the Jordan Valley. In 1970, Israel declared the area a closed military zone despite the absence of any noticeable military activity. The village has been demolished four times and only around 110 permanent inhabitants remain. A further 130 people still live in the village but stay in nearby villages during the cold winter months due a lack of shelter. In November 2011, Israel served the village with a new demolition order targeting 17 structures and the village is under constant threat of demolition. The village is also affected by severe restrictions on movement and construction.

The people in Al-Hadidiye are entirely dependent on rearing animals, as they do not have sufficient water to grow crops. Nearby water pipes managed by Israeli state water company Mekorot have been declared for the exclusive use of Israeli settlements, and the digging of wells has been prohibited, so water must be brought from a natural spring in the area.⁶⁹

The nearby agricultural settlements of Ro'i and Beqa'ot have been built on land belonging to the village of Al-Hadidiye. Using the water and land appropriated from Al-Hadidiye, these settlements grow agricultural produce that is exported by Mehadrin.⁷⁰

Trade in agricultural produce from Ro'i and Beqa'ot is only possible because of the displacement and dispossession of the Palestinians of Al-Hadidiye. International trade with companies operating in settlements encourages on-going efforts to demolish the remainder of the Al-Hadidiye and other Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley similarly at risk of being removed from the map.

AdaFresh

AdaFresh is a privately owned exporter of tomatoes, peppers, fresh herbs and edible flowers. AdaFresh exports produce from settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory including herbs from the illegal settlement Na'ama.⁵⁸ The AdaFresh logo has also been photographed on a packing house in an illegal Israeli settlement called Agraman in the Jordan Valley.⁵⁹

Agrexco

Agrexco was the main Israeli agricultural export company until it was formally liquidated in September 2011, partially as a result of a large boycott campaign against it in Europe. Agrexco operated in and exported from a large number of settlements and its produce was routinely marked 'Made in Israel'. Now re-established and owned by the Bickel Group, Agrexco has regained contracts with a large number of its previous clients.⁶⁰ The Bickel Group has itself been documented to operate in illegal Israeli settlements.⁶¹

In February 2013, Corporate Watch researchers were told by Palestinian workers in the settlement of Massua that Agrexco was exporting produce from the settlement and found an operational packing house with Agrexco signage in the settlement of Vered Yeriho.⁶²

Arava

Researchers with Corporate Watch found packaging or packing houses bearing the Arava logo in numerous illegal Israeli settlements, including Beqa'ot, Mehola, Netiv Hagdud and Gilgal, Tomer, and Ro'i. The 2008 version of Arava's website featured a map of its tomato growing regions that included the occupied Jordan Valley and text explaining that it exports peppers, herbs, grapes and organic products from the Jordan Valley.⁶³ The company has subsidiaries in USA and the Netherlands and exports produce to retailers throughout Europe.

EDOM

Partially owned by UK companies, EDOM has been documented to export from a packing house in the illegal settlement of Tomer and packing houses and trucks bearing the EDOM logo have been seen in the Jordan Valley. EDOM Medjoul Dates found in Tomer were labelled as originating in Israel.⁶⁴

Hadiklaim

The Hadiklaim Israel Date Growers Collective includes date growers the settlements in the occupied Jordan Valley and exports dates including Medjoul dates from illegal Israeli settlements including the Beit Ha'Arava and Tomer settlements in the Jordan Valley.⁶⁵ The company exports to 30 countries and has supplied dates to European retailers including Migros, Tesco and Sainsbury's.⁶⁶ The company has labelled settlement dates as 'Made in Israel' and 'Made in South Africa'.⁶⁷

Hishtil

Hishtil is an Israeli plant nursery, farming and fresh produce export company. The company has been shown grow and export produce from illegal Israeli settlements including Almog, Mehola and Susya. The company has operations in South Africa, Italy, UK, France and Turkey, among other countries.⁶⁸





4. Ending international complicity

In 2005 Palestinian civil society called for a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel as a non-violent means to pressure it to comply with international law.⁷⁵

Campaigns against Israeli agricultural export companies have always been a key part of the BDS movement. In 2011, leading Israeli produce exporter Agrexco entered liquidation following a financial crisis that was exacerbated by the campaign against it that took place across 13 different European countries, especially France, involving consumer boycotts, demonstrations and lobbying.⁷⁶

Consumer boycotts and years of determined campaigning by solidarity organisations, trade unions, NGOs and faith groups have successfully pressured supermarkets and governments to begin to take action in relation to the trade with Israeli agricultural companies and their produce.

Labelling

The international community does not recognise Israel's claim that settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory are part of Israel. Despite this, products from illegal settlements are often marked 'Made in Israel'.

In 2009, the UK government responded to public pressure by issuing guidance that retailers should label products from settlements with "produce of the West Bank (Israeli settlement produce)" and Palestinian produce as "produce of the West Bank (Palestinian produce)".⁷⁷ The guidance asserted that European Union legislation requires food to be labelled in an accurate fashion. Medjoul dates and other products have been found in UK supermarket Tesco labelled as settlement produce.

In 2012, the Danish and South African governments issued similar guidance.⁷⁸ European Union officials have told campaigners that the EU may issue labelling guidance to all member states.

Swiss supermarket Migros has responded to a well-supported grassroots campaign by announcing that it would implement a labelling policy.⁷⁹

Labelling of settlement produce is a welcome step towards more restrictive measures and may lead to retailers adopting official policies of not selling settlement produce.

However, there have been numerous examples of Israeli agricultural export companies using fraudulent methods to mislead consumers, retailers and governments about the true origin of their produce.⁸⁰

In January 2013, Corporate Watch obtained labels for UK supermarket Morrisons own brand Medjoul dates from the illegal Israeli settlement of Tomer in the occupied Jordan Valley. In what appears to be a violation of the UK labelling guidance, the Morrisons packaging was marked 'Produce of Israel'.⁸¹ The exporter was the Israeli date growers' cooperative Hadiklaim, which is known to grow dates in and export dates from illegal Israeli settlements and mislabel them (see p.19).

While Morrisons claims that the dates were grown inside Israel and then packaged in Tomer, the source of this information appears to be Hadiklaim's own records and there are no date growing regions inside Israel near Tomer.⁸² This example underscores the serious problems in implementing labelling of settlement produce in the context of deception and deep involvement in settlements by Israeli export companies.

Most importantly, labelling should not become a means by which governments avoid meeting their legal and moral obligations to end trade that sustains illegal settlements and by which retailers deflect criticism for trading with Israeli companies that participate in violations of international law.

Main photo: Palestinian activists enter a Rami Levi supermarket located in the Sha'ar Binyamin settlement to protest against the Israeli occupation and settlements and to call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS).

Right: Packaging for Medjoul dates sold in UK supermarket Morrisons found in an illegal settlement were marked 'Produce of Israel' and labels that appeared to be intended for crates were marked 'Product of Israel'.



Ending imports of settlement produce

Supermarkets in a number of European countries including Norway, Sweden, the UK and elsewhere have responded to campaign pressure by implementing an official policy of not selling produce grown in illegal settlements.

Major organisations including trade union federations, churches, political parties and NGOs support boycotts of settlement products and campaign for governments to implement a ban on the import of settlement products. In October 2012, a report by a coalition of 22 major European NGOs included a recommendation for a ban on settlement imports.⁸³

The government of Ireland has pledged its support for a EU-wide ban on settlement products, and Norway's foreign minister has hinted at support

for a settlement produce ban.⁸⁴ If the EU is not prepared to implement a ban on imports of settlement produce, individual member states could implement a unilateral ban. Legal analysis conducted by Al Haq concluded that states are in violation of their obligations under international law by failing to end trade with illegal Israeli settlements.

Government regulation that bans the import or the sale of settlement produce would be a significant step that would begin to hold Israel and Israeli businesses accountable for their violations of international law.

Supermarket policies and any future government regulation to end the sale of settlement produce face the same traceability issues as labelling-based responses, although government regulation that involved tough sanctions could lead to major retailers dropping ties to companies exporting from settlements altogether.

Legal analysis

In January 2013, Palestinian human rights organisation Al Haq published a legal analysis regarding the international trade in agricultural produce from illegal Israeli settlements.⁹⁰

The report explained that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory are illegal under international law and amount to "serious breaches of peremptory norms of international law, including the right to self-determination, the prohibition against extensive destruction and appropriation of property and the prohibition against colonialism."

Al Haq went on to explain that international law places responsibility on third states such as EU members. All states are under an obligation not to recognise the situation resulting from Israel's illegal conduct as lawful, not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the illegal situation and to actively cooperate in order to bring it to an end.

Al Haq argue that by allowing agricultural produce grown in illegal Israeli settlements, states "implicitly recognise as legal a situation arising from a breach of peremptory norms of international law and thus violate their duty of non-recognition" and that "in addition, by engaging in the trade of settlement produce, States are failing to comply with their obligation to actively cooperate in order to put the Israeli settlement enterprise to an end".

A ban on the import of settlement produce would be lawful and would not contravene EU or General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) law, the report states.

Although not covered in the Al Haq report, it could also be argued that because states are obliged to take action that is effective, any ban on settlement trade should include any company involved in Israeli settlements, not just produce actually grown in settlements.



More than 1,000 people marched through Montpellier in 2009 in protest at Agrexco's plans to build a terminal in the nearby port of Sète. The campaign against Agrexco spread to 13 countries and was a major factor behind its collapse in 2011.

Ending trade with complicit companies

Agricultural companies as a whole are accountable for their conduct, and any trade with companies that export from settlements or participate in other Israeli violations of international law only serves to encourage further Israeli violations of international law and is inherently unethical. Trade with companies such as Mehadrin provides capital that can be used for investment in the expansion of illegal activities.

Furthermore, agricultural export companies routinely mis-label their produce and are known to market settlement produce as originating from inside Israel, misleading governments and retailers.⁸⁵

For these reasons, the most effective step that supermarkets, supply chain companies and governments can take to end support for Israel's illegal settlement enterprise is to altogether end trade with companies that operate in settlements, export settlement produce or participate in other violations of international law.

In 2012, The Co-operative Group, the UK's fifth largest food retailer, announced that it would end trade with all companies sourcing from settlements and immediately suspended trade with Mehadrin, Agrexco, Arava Export Growers and AdaFresh.⁸⁶

The retailer pledged to end trade with any other company found to be exporting from settlements. Co-op members and customers had asked it to adopt the policy. Retailers and supply chain companies should now adopt this effective stance.

In January 2013, Karsten Farms, a leading South African agricultural company, severed its relations with the Israeli agricultural company Hadiklaim, and also undertook not to enter into any future relations with any Israeli entity complicit in the illegal Israeli Occupation of Palestine.⁸⁷

Governments have in recent years taken action against corporate complicity with Israel's violations of international law. For example, Deutsche Bahn pulled out of an Israeli rail project in the occupied Palestinian territory upon the request of the German government.⁸⁸ The Norwegian and New Zealand pension funds have divested from Israeli companies that are involved in the construction of Israel's illegal wall and settlements.⁸⁹

Governments should also take action against corporate complicity relating to Israeli agricultural exports. Regulation could be introduced that bans the import of any products from companies sourcing or exporting from settlements. Alternatively, governments could issue voluntary guidance calling on retailers not to trade with companies exporting settlement products.

Palestinian agricultural organisations and civil society networks call for ending international trade with Israeli agricultural companies

Published 9 February 2013

We, Palestinian organisations and unions representing farmers struggling for their right to their land and to food sovereignty, urge international civil society organisations to build effective campaigns and work towards ending agricultural trade with Israel that finances and rewards the destruction of Palestinian farming.

For Palestinians, farming is tied to Palestinian identity, history and resistance to Israel's illegal occupation. Palestinian farmers face the brunt of Israel's land confiscations, demolitions and theft of water. Farmers who still have access to land and water face systematic restrictions and violence. The siege of Gaza prevents farmers from accessing basic equipment and has made exports of fresh produce almost impossible. Farmers and fishermen regularly come under attack from the Israeli military.

Israeli agricultural export companies such as Mehadrin and Hadiklaim participate in Israel's colonisation of Palestinian land by using stolen Palestinian water and growing cash crops for export markets in illegal settlements established on land in the occupied Palestinian territory, from which Palestinian farmers have been driven. Such companies also profit from the siege on Gaza.

The booming international trade with companies that operate in and export from settlements enhances the viability of Israel's illegal settlement enterprise. It also encourages and finances the expansion of settlements and the continued dispossession of Palestinian farmers.

We urge organisations and activists upholding human rights principles and the right to food sovereignty to work with us to develop campaigns aimed at ending the trade in settlement produce. The most effective way of doing so is to follow the lead of the Co-operative supermarket in the UK which decided in 2012 not to trade with any company that sources produce from Israel's illegal settlements. We call for an end to all trade with Israeli agricultural companies that are complicit with Israel's system of occupation, colonisation and apartheid.

We echo the call made by leading Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq for states “to comply with their customary international obligations, by banning produce originating from Israeli settlements in the OPT.”ⁱ Because Israeli companies routinely mislead governments and retailers about the origin of their produce, and because any trade with Israeli companies operating in settlements de facto sustains and supports these settlements, we call on states to consider banning trade with Israeli companies exporting from settlements or issuing guidance recommending that retailers avoid trade with such companies.

We reject any suggestion that the reality that Palestinians are sometimes left with no choice but to export fresh produce through Israeli companies or work in illegal settlements is a reason not to take action to end international complicity in human rights violations. Helping us to break the chains of dependency by holding Israeli companies to account and working with us to export to world markets via socially responsible and law-abiding companies is the most honest and effective way to contribute to our struggle and our sustainable development.

As the global food system has been shaped in the narrow interests of large multinational corporations, millions of farmers and indigenous people have faced exploitation and the destruction of their communities. We stand in full solidarity with all those who are also fighting for the right to their land and the freedom to make their own choices about food production, trade and social and environmental sustainability.

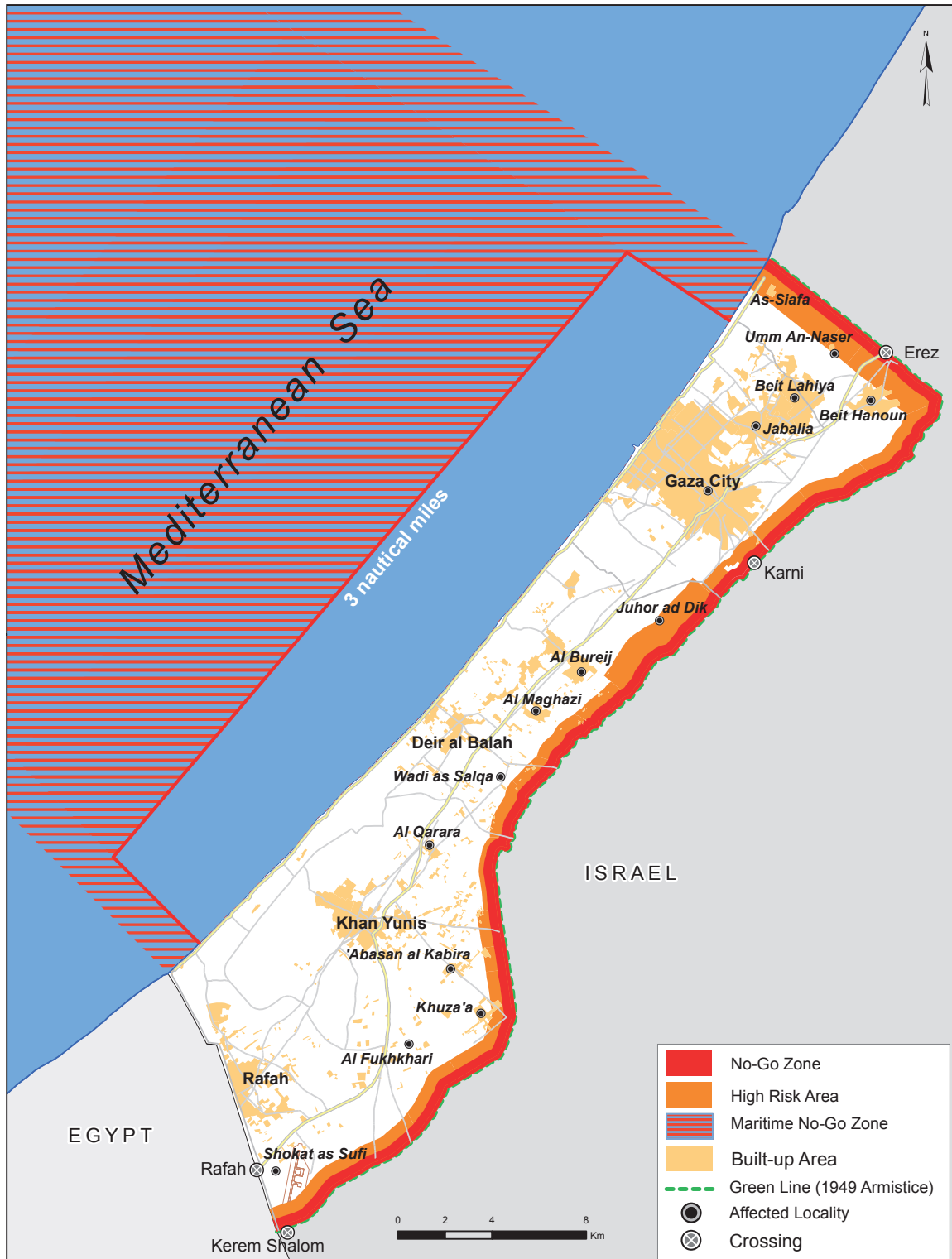
Let us join together in a struggle against occupation and dispossession, and for freedom, justice and equality.

Agricultural Guiding and Awareness Society | Al Ahleya Society for Development of Palm and Dates | Al Sattar Garbee Association for Developing Countryside and Farmer | Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem Society (ARIJ) | Arab Center for Agricultural Development | General Union of Palestinian Agricultural Cooperatives & Peasants | Land Research Center | Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees | Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee | Palestinian Farmers Association | Palestinian Farmers Union | Palestinian NGO Network | Popular Struggle Coordination Committee | Stop the Wall | Union of Agricultural Work Committees | Union of Palestinian Agriculture Engineers

i. www.alhaq.org/publications/Feasting-on-the-occupation.pdf

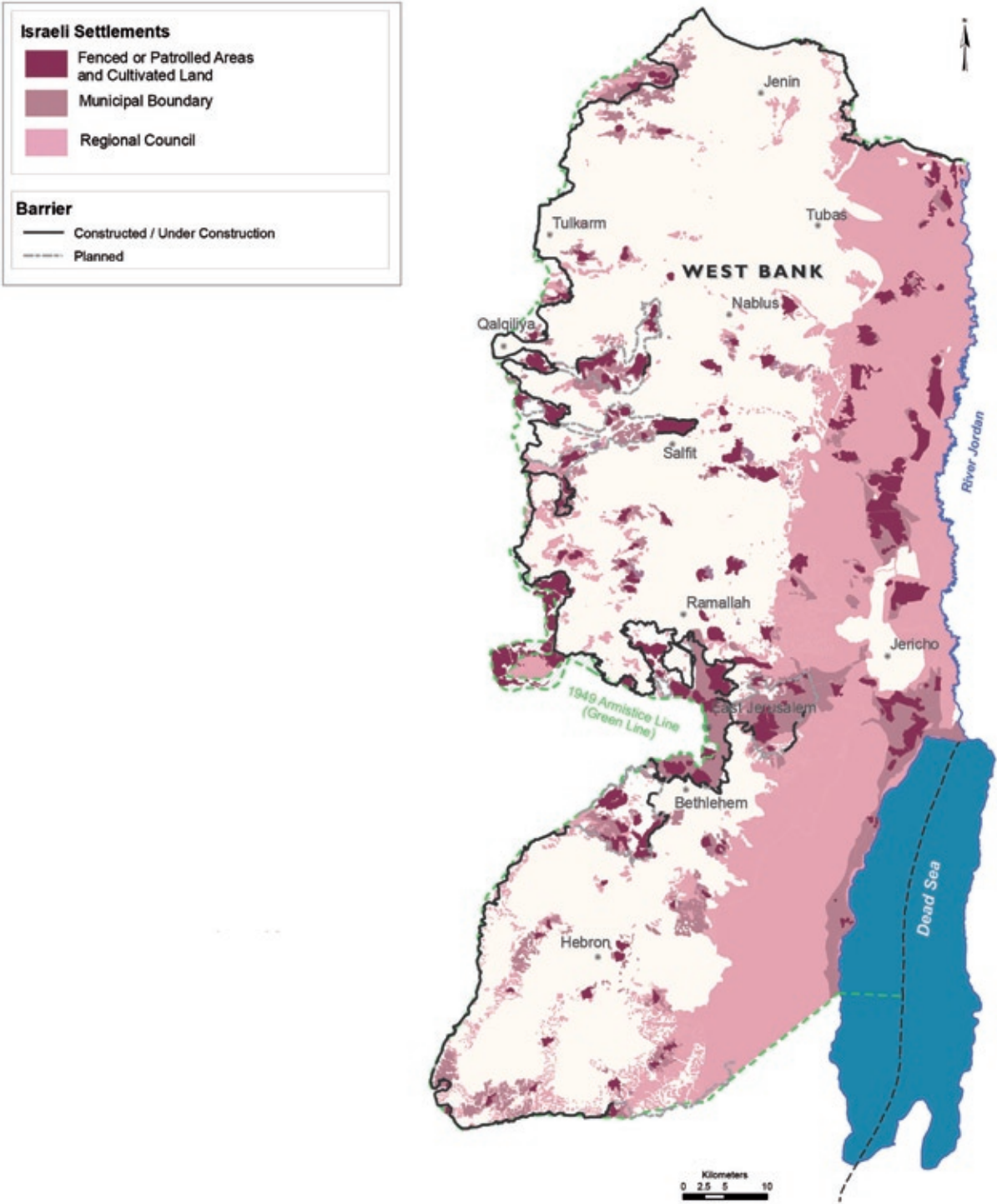
Maps

Gaza Strip: Access, restricted areas and affected localities August 2010



Map from: http://unispal.un.org/pdfs/OCHA_HumImpact-Settlements.pdf

West Bank: Land allocated to Israeli settlements December 2012



Map from: http://unispal.un.org/pdfs/OCHA_HumImpact-Settlements.pdf

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Farming Injustice

International trade with Israeli agricultural companies and the destruction of Palestinian farming

Palestinian farmers face the brunt of Israel's land confiscations, demolitions and water theft. Farmers that still have access to land and water face systematically implemented restrictions and violence.

Israeli agricultural export companies such as Mehadrin and Hadiklaim are among the primary beneficiaries of the destruction of Palestinian agriculture, operating inside and exporting produce from illegal settlements using stolen Palestinian land and water and profiting from the siege on Gaza.

This briefing aims to shed light on the systematic destruction of Palestinian agriculture by Israel and the complicity of Israeli agricultural companies in this destruction.