

# Access to Education

## Creating a safe environment despite occupation



Israeli soldiers surround children in Hebron on their way home from school. Photo: EAPPI/M.Ward

**In 1994, the Oslo Accords led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and consequently, the establishment of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the same year. As a result, the education sector saw significant advances in number of student and schools and greater inclusiveness for girls and children with disabilities. Israel's response to the Second Intifada, however, imposed immeasurable costs on the entire education system - both human and structural.**

Today, access to education in Palestine suffers greatly from attacks on schools from Israeli settlers and security forces, demolition orders on schools, and denial of education due to closures and military checkpoints.

**Attacks on schools.** The UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) noted that in 2012 there were 322 attacks on education in Palestine which directly affected 14,235

students. From January to June 2013, there were 29 attacks on schools, affecting 6,354 students. Israeli military personnel and Israeli settlers frequently visit the school and often harass children, a very intimidating endeavor for children and staff.

**Demolition orders.** Many schools are under the constant threat of demolition. Currently, the Israeli Civil Administration has issued verbal or written stopwork or demolition orders to at least 39 schools serving roughly 4,305 children in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem

**Closures & military checkpoints.** As of 30 June 2013, 51 incidents of denial of access to education were documented in Palestine, affecting more than 13,064 students. Everyday, students must pass through military checkpoints where Israeli soldiers search their belongings. Many face closures on the way to school or walk through closed military or even firing zones.

These problems lead to drop-outs, lack of attendance, decreased learning time in

school, deterioration in quality of learning, and inability of families to ensure continued education. Girls are disproportionately affected, as they are more likely to stop attending school when faced with harassment and violence. On the other hand, violence, harassment and intimidation are also gender-based, largely affecting boys.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to education." Protecting education under the Israeli occupation is a critical humanitarian concern and led to a joint project between UNICEF and EAPPI, which aims to enhance access to education and create a safe learning environment for children in Palestine.

**"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."**

~Nelson Mandela

# Access to Education

## Case Study: “Death Road” in As Sawiya

Mohamed, age 17, was walking home from school one day in Fall 2011. It was a normal day, chatting with his friends along the way. Suddenly, a bus, on its way to a nearby Israeli settlement, hit Mohamed. He suffered a head injury, broken arm and leg, which needed a platinum plate to heal.

Mohamed attended school at one of three schools in the Palestinian villages of As Sawiya and Luban. A pedestrian path used to connect these schools to the village, but 10 years ago the Israeli military destroyed the path claiming it was a security risk for the nearby Israeli settlements of Eli and Ma’le Levona.

Today, the school children must walk along Route 60, a major road connecting East Jerusalem and Ramallah to Nablus in the north. Route 60 is always busy with traffic, but even more so during rush hour when the



Students with As Sawiya school’s psychologist, Mundhir Safadi. Photo: EAPPI/M. Becker Aarseth

**“The younger children cry, the older ones ask why soldiers are here. All students come to school with a lot of stress.”**

students from As Sawiya and Luban travel to and from school. Everyday, children must walk on this road next to passing trucks, buses, and cars. Locals now call Route 60 “Death Road,” due to frequent accidents, like that of Mohamed.

“I went to report the accident at the police station in Ariel settlement,” describes Mustafa, Mohamed’s father. “The officer replied, ‘The problem is not the bus, the problem is your son’ When I asked him: ‘Where should my son walk?’ he replied: ‘Not on the road.’ The children have no choice: there was a walkway, but the military destroyed it.”

“Death Road” is not the only obstacle to education the children of As Sawiya face. Israeli settlers frequently throw stones at children and Israeli military personnel arrest children on the way to school. Even during school, Israeli soldiers and military vehicles

show their presence and enter the school and check children’s bags on a monthly basis.

All of these obstacles take a huge mental toll for the students: “The younger children cry, the older ones ask why soldiers are here,” explains Adnan, the school’s principal. “Yet, all the students come to school with a lot of stress. They are unable to concentrate and this results in poor grades.”

After 10 years, the Israeli Civil Administration finally gave the Palestinian Authority permission to rebuild the pedestrian walkway and construction began. The dangers that settlers and soldiers pose, however, cannot be fixed so easily.

### ABOUT EAPPI

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) is a programme of the World Council of Churches that brings internationals to the West Bank. Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) are our volunteers who listen to people’s struggles, share stories of human rights abuses through reports and writing, and protect vulnerable communities. They join Palestinians and Israelis who are working together non-violently for peace and support the local churches. When they return home, EAs talk about their first-hand experiences to open the eyes of the world to the realities of occupation and campaign for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict based on international law.

### WHERE WE WORK: 8 PLACEMENTS

