

WCC-EAPPI: ensuring safe access to schools under occupation

Attacks on schools and denial of access to education



Left: EA intervenes as soldiers detain and search children's schoolbags on their way to school. EAPPI/S. Vilpponen 2015.
Right: Israeli soldiers prevent schoolboys from reaching school in Nablus. Photo EAPPI/ R.Vineywood 2015

In Palestine, the obstacles to receiving an education are numerous. Large numbers of Palestinian children living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem experience serious harassment and hurdles on their way to and from school as well as in school yards and classrooms. WCC-EAPPI monitors have witnessed many attacks over the past year and indicated that attacks are becoming more frequent. Delays at checkpoints, military presence, settler attacks, treacherous roads, closed military zones, demolition orders and violent clashes are among the obstacles that children face. As the security situation in many parts of Palestine continues to deteriorate the protection of schools, students and their right to education needs to be respected and prioritised.

The UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) noted that in 2015 there were 156 attacks on education in Palestine, which directly affected 19, 276 students. These attacks were committed by Israeli settlers and the Israeli military and included: acts of vandalism, acts of harassment and/or physical violence towards Palestinian students on their commutes to and from school; military raids; usage of schools as interrogation and or detention centers; and firing of tear gas, stun grenades, rubber bullets and live ammunition in and around school premises.

Since April 2012, WCC-EAPPI, in cooperation with UNICEF, has monitored access to education for children in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In 2016, Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) are providing protective presence and accompaniment to some 3,500 students and 300 teachers by monitoring nine schools as well as 6 checkpoints that children pass on a daily basis. The presence of EAs deters soldiers and settlers from harassing children on their way to and from school.

“I am afraid of settlers and scared of soldiers. They try to scare us by pointing their guns at us and stamping their feet. Settlers also drive very fast past us. [...] When we see settlers we want to turn back and go home but when we see EAs I feel safer and keep walking.” - ten year old Qusai in fifth grade in Cordoba school, Hebron 2015



Case Study: Attacks on education at As-Sawiyeh Al Lubban School



Above: EA accompanies schoolchildren to As Sawiyeh School under military presence. EAPPI/ M.Andren2016

As-Sawiyeh Al Lubban is a co-educational high school in the Nablus, in the northern West Bank. The school is located in Area C where Israel retains near exclusive control, including over law enforcement. This school had more verified attacks than any other school in Palestine last year and is considered one of the most vulnerable in the West Bank.

During the last academic year, 2014-2015, the MRM recorded a total of 44 education related incidents at As-Sawiyeh Al Lubban school. Incidents included nine cases of detention school children, three attacks against children (including physical assault), four attacks on schools, six threats of violence to school and staff, seven weapon fire attacks (including plastic coated metal bullets and other types of ammunition) and one case of confiscation of school of education material. In addition the school was temporarily used as a military base on one occasion and searched on another.

Statistics tell only one side of the story, however. The incidents listed above have resulted in **a reduction in time for learning; poorer academic achievements; a lack of attendance; and increased dropout rates.** Parents are also increasingly pulling their children out of school due to the dangers that they face during their commutes. Girls are disproportionately affected, and are more likely to stop attending school when faced with harassment or physical abuse.

Clashes between students throwing stones and soldiers erupt on occasion, but the presence of EAs has proved to deter students from throwing stones as well as deter soldiers from responding with crowd dispersion means.

Whilst the problems at As-Sawiyeh Al Lubban are ongoing, there has been a significant decrease in attacks on the school children since EAs began monitoring regularly. When a group of students were asked what they thought of EAs, who monitor the route to school throughout the year, one replied, **“You save us from the soldiers!”**. Another said, **“I feel less afraid when I see you”**. The head teacher, Adnan Hussien, stated that he regarded EAPPI as **“vitaly important to the protection of the school”**.



Above: EA monitors and reports on Israeli army deny teachers and students access to As-Sawiyeh School. EAPPI/R.Vineywood 2014

These systematic restrictions imposed by the Government of Israel on access to education in Palestine violate Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), the *International Covenant on Economic, Social And Cultural Rights* (1966), the *Convention on the Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women* (1979), and the *Convention On The Rights of The Child* (1989). In addition safe access to education is essential for the exercise of other human rights.

Palestinian children have the right to unhindered access to education free from harassment at checkpoints or violence during commute.

ABOUT WCC-EAPPI

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) is an international observer programme that supports Israelis and Palestinians working for peace. Since the programme began in 2002 it has brought more than 1,800 volunteers from more than 25 countries to East Jerusalem and the West Bank. EAPPI volunteers walk Palestinian children to school in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, accompanying them on the often perilous journey past settlements. They also monitor checkpoints, and report on human rights violations such as house demolitions or settler violence. In addition, they support Israeli and Palestinian groups in advocating for a just peace based on international law.