



## **Surrounded – one family’s personal Gaza**

Hani and Munira A’amer married and moved in to their new house in Mas’ha in the West Bank thirty years ago. In doing so they joined thousands of ex-residents of the Palestinian town of Kufr Qasem who, having fled the fighting in 1967, now found themselves stranded on the other side of the Green Line and forced to establish a new village on what had previously been their grazing land. Mas’ha is about three kilometers to the east of Kufr Qasem and the Green Line.

Hani and Munira’s house was on the outskirts of the village until twenty years ago when construction of the illegal Israeli settlement of Elkana left their backdoor ten meters from its perimeter fence. But, although her family had lost land to the settlement, Munira formed friendships with her Jewish neighbors, visiting to congratulate birthdays and weddings, or simply chatting through the chain link fence. The conviviality died, however, with the breakout of the second Intifada; hostile border guards fiercely patrolled the barrier, leaving Munira’s children scared to play in the remains of their yard, while former friends shrank from each other in fear.

Two years and much suffering later - and despite increasing condemnation from around the world - the construction of the Israeli Military’s separation barrier, or ‘Apartheid Wall’, is advancing through Mas’ha. Of all the tragic stories of land lost and communities divided, the tale of Munira and Hani A’amer has to be one of the most absurd: given their proximity to the settlement of Elkana, which the IDF has deemed must be on the Israeli side, the A’amers’ house will also be to the west of the wall. The fence in their backyard will remain, however, leaving them surrounded, completely ring-fenced into an area of approximately hundred meters square. They will be the sole residents of a tiny island of the West Bank beyond the reach of their nation, their family and friends. They will be in political limbo, their status unclear even as to their relationship with the rest of the West Bank with whom they will only have access three times a day, at times determined by and subject to the security requirements of the Israelis, who will also apparently hold the only key!

As the bulldozers approach the house the Palestinian, Israeli and international members of the Mas’ha Peace Camp, established almost a month ago in an effort to ward off, or at least stick up to the impending, de facto destruction of Mas’ha, have occupied the A’amers house in solidarity and protest. Their closest neighbours, their old friends in Elkana meanwhile, are nowhere to be seen.

Munira and Hani have six children. What if, they ask, one of them gets sick in the night of Shabbat (when Jews traditionally abstain from physical activity)? What if friends dare to come and visit (having managed to get the necessary ‘permit’) and then for some reason can’t leave? What if they run out of food or water?

The A’amers’ fate is an acute illustration of the situation many thousands of Palestinians will find themselves in once the spotlights and motion detectors operate along the \$2 million-a-mile wall. Up to 10 percent of the West Bank (much of it prime agricultural land) and 14,000 of its residents will soon be sealed into the Israeli side forced to walk or drive the miles out of their way distantly-spaced gates in the fence will require of their journey, with no guarantees of passage when they get there. Those few who can afford to may end up renting houses on the ‘other side’ to assure access to vital services and for the peace of mind that their children won’t stray into the “shoot-on-site” areas around the wall’s base. Others may simply end up having to leave. But for now most, including the A’amers, vow to stay.