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I have now been in my placement in Jerusalem (at the Augusta Victoria Hospital, Mount of Olives) for ten days as an Ecumenical Accompanier (EA). In the last week, the work of the Jerusalem EA team has included: English lessons with the Jaholine Bedouin and children in Shu'fat refugee camp (while we were in Shu'fat camp on Tuesday 6th March, Israeli soldiers fired tear-gas at children in the camp who were playing to close to the fence surrounding Shu'fat); accompanying the Augusta Victoria Hospital ambulance into the West Bank to collect patients; attending the 'Women in Black' demonstration in West Jerusalem; monitoring four checkpoints in East Jerusalem; attending a march on International Womens' Day at Qalandiya (during which sound grenades were thrown at the female demonstrators by the Israeli army); and rebuilding demolished homes near Hebron with the Israeli peace organisation Rabbis for Human Rights.

One of the main roles that all six teams of EAs (Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jayyous, Yanoun, Tulkarem) have is to monitor checkpoints around the West Bank and East Jerusalem. According to the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, there are currently more than 500 checkpoints, roadblocks and other physical obstacles inside the West Bank that obstruct the freedom of movement of the Palestinians. The Israeli government justifies these restrictions on the grounds of security, to prevent Palestinians from attacking Israeli citizens in Israel and in the West Bank, where around 400,000 Israelis have settled contrary to International Humanitarian Law.

One of the first checkpoints I visited was the Al Ram checkpoint (pictured below) in northern East Jerusalem. We (four members of the Jerusalem team of EAs) arrived at the checkpoint just before 7am to monitor school children passing through the area.



Jerusalem EA, Doug Lackie, negotiates with an Israeli soldier at Al Ram checkpoint

Photo credit: John Sharp/EAPPI

The expressions on the faces of those coming through the checkpoint said a lot. Adults, trying to pass the checkpoint on their way to work looked embarrassed, frustrated, and humiliated. We noticed one middle-aged woman who was having a lot of difficulty getting

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past the Israeli soldiers. It had looked like one of the soldiers had been ready to let the woman pass through, but another soldier had intervened and had turned the woman back. When I asked the young soldier why he was not letting the woman through, he said it was because her name did not appear on the list that he had been given by his superiors. However, bizarrely, the same woman was then allowed through the checkpoint about 30 minutes later.

At the same checkpoint we also witnessed two men being detained in steel cargo containers before being turned back by soldiers, and another man who was made to stand facing a wall for 10 minutes before being allowed through. In the midst of all of this, children passed through the checkpoint on their way to school, with some of them stopped and questioned.



Palestinians waiting to pass through the first turnstile at Qalandiya checkpoint

Photo credit: John Sharp/EAPPI

Qalandiya (pictured above) and Hazeytim checkpoints, which we have also been monitoring in East Jerusalem, are very different to Al Ram. They are known as ‘terminals’, and are fairly large constructions. Those wishing to pass through these checkpoints have to queue at a first turnstile, before being allowed through to another turnstile with metal detector, and then finally passing through a third turnstile to exit.

Each of the turnstiles is controlled electronically by a soldier who lets people know the turnstile is operational by switching on a green light above the turnstile. I have observed on numerous occasions the green light for turnstiles being ‘played’ with by the soldiers – the green light being ‘flickered’ on and off as people try to get through. As you might imagine, it can take people a long time to get through these checkpoints. We timed how long it took one women with a baby to get through the terminal at Hazeytim – exactly 50 minutes.

A schoolteacher who was *not* allowed to pass the Al Ram checkpoint commented to us, “this is our daily reality, *the soldiers work to delay us, we are suffering a lot. The whole world needs to know what is happening here.*”

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