

Jerusalem Journal – 6th April

Easter greetings from Jerusalem. As you might imagine the city has been very busy over the last week. It has been quite an experience attending some of the special events that have been held in and around the city, such as the Palm Sunday procession last week from the Mount of Olives down to the Old City. I lost count of the number of different languages that I heard people speaking. I wonder though how many of the visitors who come to Jerusalem actually see what is happening beyond the Old City and all the famous religious sites.

As I may have mentioned before the Ecumenical Accompanier Programme has six placements – Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jayyous, Yanoun and Tulkarem. Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) are able to visit some of the other placements during their 3 month stay to allow them to see what life is like outside their own placement. This week I spent three days working with the EA team in the rural placement of Jayyous - which was quite a change from the busyness of Jerusalem.

Jayyous, a fairly large village of around 3,000 people, lies forty miles north of Jerusalem. The scenery travelling up the West Bank to Jayyous is beautiful, and the village itself is surrounded on one side by terraced olive groves, that reminded me of visits to some of the Greek islands. To the west of Jayyous lies the fertile land that farmers from the village have been farming for generations. The well-irrigated land suits perfectly the growing of citrus, fig, apricot, and almond trees.



The view north from Javvous with the separation barrier separating farmers from their land

Photo credit: John Sharp/EAPPI

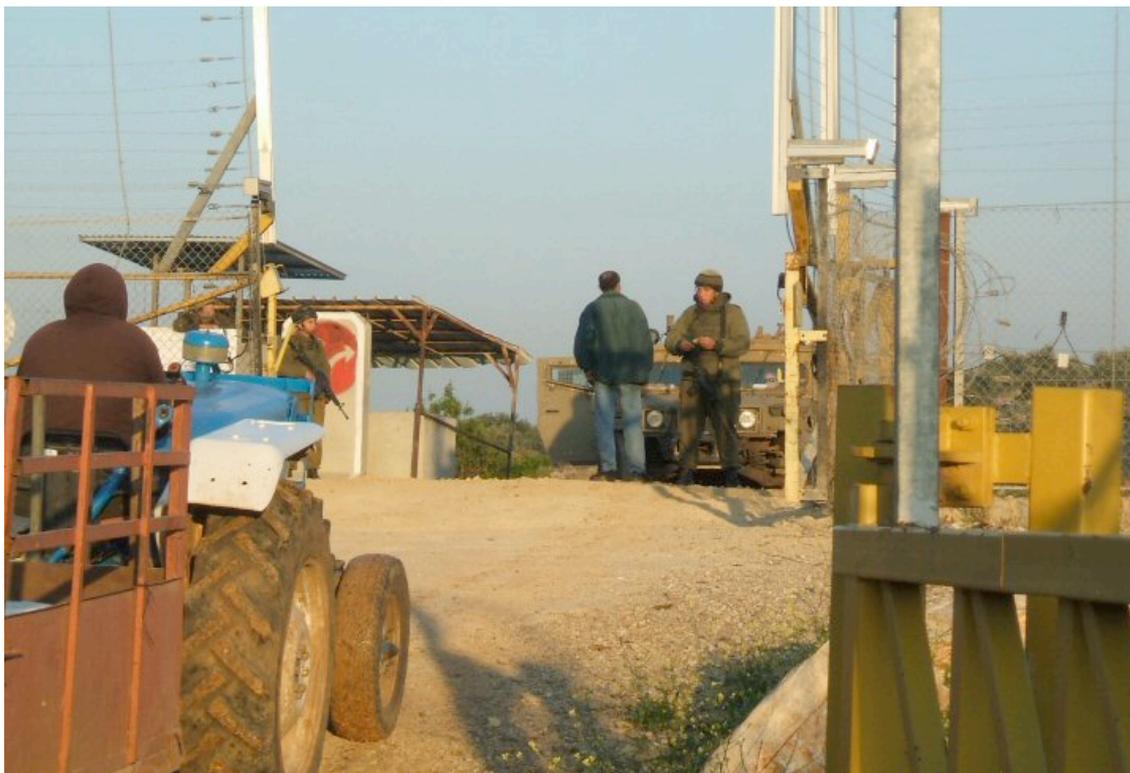
Israel's 703km long separation barrier, which was completed in this part of the West Bank in 2003 cuts off the farmers of Jayyous from this land. Unlike other parts of the West Bank where the separation barrier stands as a 8 meter high concrete wall, around Jayyous the barrier takes the form of 50 yards wide 'clear zone' made up of two anti-tank ditches, two razor-wire fences, and in the centre a four-metre high electronic detection steel fence.

John Sharp – Ecumenical Accompanier, EAPPI

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To the north of Jayyous the separation barrier lies on the Green Line (that was established in 1949 between Israel and what is now the occupied Palestinian territory), but the barrier then comes in off the Green Line and encloses approximately 3,000 acres of Palestinian farmland to the West of Jayyous.

Access gates have been built into the separation barrier, and farmers with permits are allowed to pass through these gates to work their land. However, often requests for permits are rejected, and even with valid permits it can still be difficult for farmers to reach their land, not to mention that the positioning of the gates means that often they have to travel unnecessarily long distances.



Farmers from Jayyous negotiating the 'North Gate' to gain access to their land

Photo credit: John Sharp/EAPPI

A mile further north from Jayyous lies the village of Falamyia. Here the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have recently constructed a new gate in the separation barrier. The Falamyia gate is more complex than the two gates at Jayyous, it even includes a steel turnstile (like the turnstiles at some of the big checkpoints around Jerusalem) and farmers in Falamyia have had to learn how to get their sheep through this turnstile one by one!

As I worked with the Jayyous EA team monitoring the south and north gates at Jayyous I could see how frustrating it was for the farmers to go through the daily procedure of: waiting for the gate to open (the south gate only opens in the morning for 15 minutes, between 7:30am – 7:45am); showing their permits to the soldiers; being questioned; having their donkey or tractor searched - before finally being allowed through to get on to *their* land.

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