

"Good fences make good neighbours"

From open prisons to Palestinian Ghettos

In February 2001, a delegation from Pax Christi International had visited Israel and Palestine. One of the main conclusions of this study visit had been that the Palestinian villages had appeared like open prisons because of the numerous military barriers and harassments of every kind.

In December 2003 another delegation from the Movement came to the Holy Land. This time they spoke increasingly of Palestinian ghettos. It would be a historical error to ignore at this present time the Israeli policy of racial segregation. On the 1st of December on their way from Jerusalem to Haifa the delegation became aware of the long dividing wall together with the construction of new roads for the Jewish colonists. At Qalqilyah the delegation visited the mayor and received first hand information about this wall which encircles the town.

High walls make good neighbours?

"High walls make good neighbours" say the Americans. Since the 15th of April 2002 the Israelis have undertaken the construction of a barrier, consisting for the most part of a high wall, to separate the Palestinian Territories from the rest of the world. The reason officially given by the Israelis is that this barrier can prevent and render impossible the suicide attacks carried out by the Palestinians in Israel. Instead of addressing the causes of violence they have resorted to collective punishment of the Palestinians.

Is the building of this wall really the best way of ensuring good neighbourliness?

In the debate that has arisen following this deliberately drastic measure, some speak of an electronic barrier 4 metres high, others of an apartheid wall 8 metres tall. In the US Congress they refuse to talk of apartheid, because that would have too much resonance. The Representatives prefer to use softer terms and speak of a barrier. The Israeli government for its part uses the expression "security measure".

In any case the result is the same. An impassible rampart surrounds the Palestinian towns and villages. There is only one way out for each village, equipped with an Israeli checkpoint. Social and economic life is paralysed. This leads to unemployment, great difficulty in getting to school, no way through for ambulances, very often separation of families, impossibility for farmers to get access to their fields except by long detours.

The wall is built on Palestinian territory, usually to the detriment of the farmers, extending in places up to 30 kilometres into the West Bank. Houses are demolished. Many Palestinians are deprived of running water. High watchtowers are built ever closer together, from which the soldiers can observe what is happening in the Palestinian ghettos. The wall will soon be 700 kilometres long, shutting some 200,000 Palestinians in the isolation of a ghetto. They can no longer have access to the produce of their fields and this wall or this fence thus locks in some 50% of the Palestinian Territories. What is striking is the speed at which this wall has been built.

Most of the villages are cut off from one another by the building of this wall and this enclosure, and also by the construction of new roads which can be used only by the colonists. They are planning to build new roads

linking numerous settlements on the West Bank. The Palestinian territories are thus torn apart and many of their inhabitants, mainly the younger ones, emigrate in search of a future and a meaning to their existence.

Bad fences make bad neighbours

"Bad fences make bad neighbours" say the Palestinians. Some people maintain that the hatred felt by the two populations is so intense that it appears to many that it would be better for them to be effectively separated so that later on, after several generations, they could set up new and viable economic and political links. It is an absolutely drastic measure to separate two populations by a barrier or a high wall. Such a policy does not offer any hope of future co-operation; on the contrary, after a visit to the West Bank you have increasingly the impression that the actual policy of the Israeli government is to systematically take over the Palestinian territories and to force the population to emigrate. After occupation will come annexation. The two state model has to be considered as dead and buried.

This security measure offers no chance of peace or security either for the Israelis or for the Palestinians. It is a wall of shame and of hatred.

Paul Lansu
18 December 2003