In Palestine, the obstacles to receiving an education are numerous. Large numbers of Palestinian school-age children living in the West Bank experience serious harassment and hurdles on their way to and from school due to Israel’s occupation policies. Checkpoints, military presence, settler attacks, treacherous roads, closed military zones, demolition orders and violent clashes are among the obstacles that they face. Students & teachers persevere daily in their journey to receive quality education. Alarmingly attacks on schools, by the Israeli military and settlers are widespread in the West Bank and carry grave risks for children.

"Incidents involving school children and schools almost tripled in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, from 2013 to 2014, affecting nearly 25,000 Palestinian children in 2014. Affected children grew up exposed to violence from an early age and many suffer from emotional and psychological distress, including experiencing recurrent nightmares and bedwetting. Over 77 per cent of students in Hebron showed symptoms of moderate to severe post-traumatic stress disorder."

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ report “The Humanitarian Coordinator calls for children’s safe access to school in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem”
UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ 26 February 2015

Since April 2012, EAPPI, in cooperation with UNICEF, has monitored Access to Education for children in the West Bank. In 2015, Ecumenical Accompaniers 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.

"They protect us from the soldiers" - Nine year old schoolgirl from Tuqu School, Bethlehem
Case Study: Attacks and closures at As Sawiya Al Lubban School

As Sawiya - Al Lubban is a co-education high school in the Nablus, in the northern West Bank. This school had more verified attacks than any other school in Palestine last year. Access restrictions and a strong military presence in the vicinity of the school is a daily norm.

As Sawiya is particularly vulnerable to Israeli military harassment due to its proximity to Route 60, which is the main road connecting East Jerusalem and Ramallah. Both Palestinians and Israelis, including settlers from the nearby illegal Israeli settlements of Eli and Ma'ale Levona, use route 60. The types of problems faced by the schoolchildren include acts of harassment and/or physical violence from soldiers on their commutes to and from school; military raids; usage of schools as interrogation and/or detention centers; and firing of teargas, stun-grenades, rubber bullets and live ammunition in and around school premises. Flying checkpoints, road closures are also common. Moreover, the Israeli soldiers frequently guard Israeli settlers as they vandalize school property, harass and physically attack Palestinian school children on their commutes to and from school. 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.

These problems have resulted in a reduction in time for learning; poorer academic achievements; a lack of attendance; and increased dropout rates. It is also reported that parents are increasingly pulling their children out of school due to the dangers that they face during their daily commutes. Girls are disproportionally affected, as they are more likely to stop attending school when faced with harassment or physical abuse.

ABOUT 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 1,000 volunteers from more than 25 countries to 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.

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