Since 23 September 2013, access to the village of ‘Azzun ‘Atma has been severely restricted. The previously inactive Azzun Atma partial checkpoint (AA1) has been re-activated with extensive restrictions, an increased military presence, and a rise in arrests and detentions. The checkpoint was activated following the discovery of a murdered off-duty Israeli soldier in the Qalqiliya area on 21 September 2013. The closure restricts free movement between the village and the rest of the West Bank, thereby having a deleterious social and economic impact on the village.

Background

• ‘Azzun ‘Atma is located in the south-western part of the Qalqiliya district. The Israeli settlements of Oranit, Sha’are Tiqwa, Ez Efrayim, Elqana and Magen Dan surround ‘Azzun ‘Atma on 3 sides.
• ‘Azzun ‘Atma used to be in the seam zone until 2010 when it regained West Bank status through an Israeli Supreme Court decision. The construction of the new barrier, which makes a full circle around the village, started in 2013, but is yet to be finished.
• ‘Azzun ‘Atma has roughly 3000 inhabitants, but the seam zone checkpoint Azzun Atma 2 (AA2) is a major transit route for Palestinian workers from the northern West Bank, mostly for work in the nearby Israeli settlements.
• UNOCHA categorises the Azzun Atma (AA1) as a partial checkpoint, which means that it is only periodically active. EAPPI has monitored the AA1 checkpoint on a weekly basis for 4 years and recorded that the checkpoint was rarely manned, in which cases there was always access to the village.
• Local workers reported to EAPPI that following the discovery of the murdered Israeli soldier in the nearby village Sanniriya, the Israeli army placed ‘Azzun ‘Atma under complete closure for roughly 24 hours between 21 and 22 September 2013. Soldiers at the AA1 checkpoint told EAPPI observers that the closure was due to the murder investigations. The alleged murderer was resident of another neighbouring village, Beit Amin. On Tuesday, 24 September, soldiers explained to EAPPI that the checkpoint was still active because they were looking for accomplices and that the checkpoint would therefore remain active indefinitely. Since 23 September the partial checkpoint was fully activated. Israeli soldiers informed EAPPI that the AA1 checkpoint is open 24/7, but only people with permits and from the below mentioned residences can enter the village.

Extent of Access Restrictions

Abed Al-Kareem, secretary to the mayor of ‘Azzun ‘Atma reports that only residents of the villages of ‘Azzun ‘Atma, Beit Amin and Sanniriya can enter through the (AA1) without permits. This affects teachers residing elsewhere, he explains. They are only allowed to enter based on a list the Municipality of ‘Azzun ‘Atma submits. The Directorates of Health and Education in Qalqiliya district reported that they have been denied entry since the closure. Maide Saleem, the Director of Health, reported that the Directorate of Health was only allowed to enter ‘Azzun ‘Atma once on 27 October with one vehicle transporting one doctor and medicine. He also reported that the Directorate of Health has not been allowed entry since, despite one attempt to get an access permit through the Palestinian DCL in Qalqiliya. Headmistress Suhaire Yousaf of the ‘Azzun ‘Atma Girls’ school reports that chemicals are not allowed to be brought into ‘Azzun ‘Atma, even for education purposes.

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Impact of Access Restrictions

- **Education** - A total of 76 students and 37 teachers must pass through the AA1 checkpoint every day. According to the Headmistress of the ‘Azzun ‘Atma Girls School, Suhair Adel Yousef, deliveries, including school supplies, have not been granted access since the closure. All school supplies must be brought to the school by the staff themselves. Major deliveries, however, were made to the school in Beit Amin, where private cars delivered the supplies to schools in ‘Azzun ‘Atma personally. According to Mrs. Suhair Adel Yousef, teaching chemistry has become increasingly difficult since no new chemicals are allowed through the checkpoint. Mr. Nidal Hilal, Administrative Deputy Director of the Directorate of Education reports that they have not been allowed to enter and to conduct their weekly visits including teacher support, student evaluation, and administrative meetings. These meetings are now held in Qalqiliya at the office of the directorate. On 23 October, EAPPI encountered a substitute teacher who had been denied entry to the village in the morning, because her name was not on the list of teachers. The Directorate of Education, however, is not aware of such a list.

- **Health** - ‘Azzun ‘Atma is a small village with only one nurse, but no doctor. Since the closure, no ambulances have been allowed into ‘Azzun ‘Atma. According to Mr. Abed Al-Kareem, Secretary to the Mayor of ‘Azzun ‘Atma, except for the 27 October visit of a doctor, no doctors have been allowed to enter the village, when normally a public health doctor would come twice a week. Lack of access to doctors will have great humanitarian implications.

- **Agriculture** - For workers with permits, the closure means that there are now two checkpoints to go through before being able to go to work. While the rush hour for Sundays at AA2 used to be around 5.00 in the morning, as EAPPI previously monitored, the new rush hours in AA1 are between 16.30 and 22.00, the night before. Mr. Abed Al-Kareem reports, that while the farmers have generally been allowed to access their land since the closure, it has proved difficult to find young manual labour. This is the usual case for the surrounding seam zone but now also for land inside ‘Azzun ‘Atma. The chemical ban is affecting farmers who use fertilisers. The only comfort for farmers during the olive harvest was that it was a bad olive year, he concludes.

- **Economy** - Restrictions on access for both people and goods have had a severe impact on the local economy. Apart from the shop owners who reside elsewhere, there are obvious difficulties transporting merchandise since no regular deliveries can be made, according to Abed Al-Kareem. Most significantly, the amount of customers has drastically decreased. There are a significantly reduced number of workers passing through and no family visitors at all. Shopowner Mr. Shadi Maher Subhi Ahmad in the centre of the village told EAPPI observers that while he usually has 1 000 customers and earns 10 000 NIS per day, the equivalent is now 100 - 300 customers per day and a daily income of 1 000 - 3 000 NIS. While normally Shadi would get his merchandise from Qalqiliya two-three times a week, he only goes once a week and on occasion the soldiers would not let him bring all his merchandise into the village. Shadi gets his fresh bread delivered to the checkpoint where he carries it through the checkpoint and into the village.

- **Social Impact** - Social life is suffering since no visitors, not even relatives, are allowed to enter. Emotionally, this was very trying during the high holiday of Eid al-Adha, according to a woman who wishes to remain anonymous. Abed al-Kareem recalled another important social event, an engagement party, which faced problems due to the closure. Arriving at the checkpoint, the groom-to-be from Jayyus and his family were denied entry. Instead, the family of the bride-to-be moved the party outside the checkpoint and celebrated there in the street.

*Left: Children pass through the AA1 checkpoint on their way to school. Photo EAPPI/A-M Nyström.
Right: A line of cars wait to enter ‘Azzun ‘Atma at 5:00 am. Photo EAPPI/M. Schaffluetzel.*