

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
November 14, 2013



Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes here.](#)

This week's Middle East Notes presents articles on the peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians, continued settlement construction, the region's invisible Christians, control of the Jordan Valley, the "de-development" strategy of the Israeli government towards the Palestinians, Secretary Kerry's public criticism of Israel's settlement activities, and other issues.

- Some of the many issues included in the CMEP Bulletins for November 1 and November 8 highlight olive harvest attacks by settlers, release of Palestinian prisoners and continuing settlement construction, and Secretary Kerry's frustrations.
- Mustafa Barghouthi writes in Al Ahram Weekly: "Freedom is not something one can beg for. It is something one must struggle for."
- Bradley Burston comments on an interview he had with Uri Avnery who asked the questions: will Israel still exist 90 years from now? Should it?
- James Zogby in Common Good Forum notes that for decades now, Christians have been the "invisible or ignored victims" of conflicts in the Middle East.
- Ma'an News Agency reports that PLO official Yasser Abed Rabbo said that Israel is not seriously engaging in peace talks with PLO negotiators: "There is one party negotiating, and that is us, while the other party is not proposing anything that goes in line with international legitimacy and law."
- Robert Taft in The Telegraph notes that Benjamin Netanyahu is planning to build a security barrier between the West Bank and Jordan in a move aimed at asserting Israel's control over the borders of a future Palestinian state.
- Mark Braverman in his Politics of Hope Blog reflects on the two state illusion, racism in Israel, and Jewish hubris.
- Robert Cohen interviews Mark Braverman about his newest book, *A Wall in Jerusalem*, in which Braverman, a Jew, writes of the Christian duty to take up the cause of Palestinian rights.
- The Palestinian Center for Human Rights notes that many NGOs are calling on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to halt all forms of cooperation with the World Bank-sponsored Red Sea - Dead Sea Conveyance Project (RSDSCP) and to take an unequivocal public stance of rejection to the project.
- In Interfaith Peace Builders' (IFPB) second report, Martin Karcher concludes that considering even a few examples of the Israeli regime confronting Palestinians and impeding the development of the Palestinian economy in Greater Jerusalem and the West Bank, one can only conclude that the Israeli development strategy for Palestinians is a de-development strategy, something not seen since the time of colonization.
- IFPB presents its fourth trip report: "Witnessing harsh realities and reasons for hope."
- In the Israel Policy Forum's The State of Two States - Week of November 3, pertinent quotes are referenced concerning recent two state developments.
- The Israel News reports that Secretary of State Kerry recently said that if Israel-PA peace talks fail, violence in region may return but he notes that negotiations have so far been "productive."
- Raphael Ahren in The Times of Israel comments on an extremely unusual with Israel's Channel 2 and the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, in which a very frustrated Kerry basically blamed the Israeli government for stealing the Palestinians' land and the Israeli public for living in bubble that prevents them from caring much about it.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins, November 1 and 8, 2013

Olive harvest marred by settler attacks, occupation: The month of October is peak olive harvesting season in the West Bank and Gaza. Every year, Palestinians tend to the trees that bring \$100 million to their economy, supporting about 100,000 farming families. But the season is often fraught with crime and violence. ...

In recent years, extremist settler groups have brazenly attacked the trees by burning them and even using chain saws. In 2012, vandals from settlements destroyed 7,500 trees. According to Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights group, these attacks are “intended...as an attack on [Palestinian] identity and heritage.” ...

Rabbi Arik Asherman, the president of Rabbis for Human Rights, said he has seen some improvements this year. He says some farmers are now allowed to access lands they haven't reached for up to 15 years. But in regards to settler violence, he says, “We were quite surprised that the [Israeli] security forces, knowing that Palestinians were working today [Sunday] and knowing what had happened, didn't manage to stop the attack with iron bars.” He continued to say that Rabbis for Human Rights is “frequently told that the security forces can't allocate any more resources, and that this year the usual harvest reinforcement was not provided.”

Data from Yesh Din shows that not only is there a lack of protection, but a lack of prosecution. The group estimates that 97 percent of investigations of damage to Palestinian olive trees are closed due to “police failings” with only four cases out of 211 resulting in indictments. ...

[Read the entire November 1 CMEP Bulletin here.](#)

Kerry takes frustrations public: On [November 4], the three month-old peace process was floundering. Palestinian negotiators were incensed not only over last week's settlement announcement, but also the Israeli claim that Palestinian negotiators had agreed to allow these periodic announcements as part of the deal to renew negotiations. Enter Secretary of State John Kerry. The chief U.S. diplomat held a marathon of closed door meetings but before leaving the region he gave a wakeup call in the form of a joint interview with Israeli and Palestinian journalists. He said the settlement announcements sent a message that perhaps Israelis are “not really serious” about peace and warned that Israel would face international isolation and violence if a peace deal is not achieved.

Over the weekend, Palestinian negotiators protested the announcement of new settlement plans and threatened to take up the issue in international bodies. PLO Secretary Yasser Abed Rabbo said he would tell Secretary Kerry, “You either stop this farce and we go to negotiations without any one party deciding their future or we will go to the Security Council, not to condemn Israel but to demand from it better guarantees than what we have today. We will tell them there are no negotiations.” He added, “We are disappointed by the American role.” ...

[Read the entire November 8 CMEP Bulletin here.](#)

2) Breaking the Palestinian people into little bits **Mustafa Barghouti, Al Ahram Weekly, October 23, 2013 (JFPF)**

Have the Oslo Accords been a success or a failure? Are they dead or alive? Is the Oslo experience still worth revision after having had its fill of criticism during the past 20 years? What are the results of those 20 years since the agreement was signed? What use is there in discussing it after all this time and after the many peace “processes” that failed to put it into effect? Is there something we can learn from this experience?

From the Palestinian standpoint, many believe the Oslo experience was a failure. It severely damaged the cause of the Palestinian national liberation movement and forfeited the opportunity to capitalise on the results of the first Intifada that had altered balances of power on the ground. They also hold that the most salient manifestations of the failure of the accords were that they served as Israel’s cover for doing whatever it wanted and not doing what it had no intention to do. In fact, Israel effectively cancelled whole sections of the agreement after its incursion into the West Bank in 2002.

From the Israeli perspective, the agreement was undoubtedly a great success. In fact, it is no exaggeration to describe it as one of Israel’s greatest strokes of genius. Through Oslo, the Israelis harvested the reversal of the results of the grassroots uprising, the Palestinian recognition of the State of Israel without, moreover, specifying the 1967 borders, a severe rupture in Palestinian national ranks, the effects of which continue to plague the Palestinians, the marginalisation of the Palestinians in the diaspora from their national liberation movement, and the replacement of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the leader of the national struggle by the Palestinian Authority (PA) which has been forced to rely increasingly on foreign aid and which is shackled by an endless list of restrictions, from the Paris economic agreement to security cooperation conditions. All the Palestinians received in return was Israeli recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Clearly, there are many negative features that not even the architects and supporters of Oslo can deny. We need to identify these precisely, now, in view of the new negotiations and especially given Israel’s — and possibly the U.S.’s — determination to reproduce the Oslo experience, regardless of the fact that its validity date has long since expired. The means towards this end is a new partial interim agreement, as laid out by Terje Roed-Larsen, a sponsor of the first Oslo Accords, during a seminar held in Oslo several days ago.

The first defect of the Oslo Accords was that they enabled Israel to de-link the core issues. This is Israel’s preferred way of altering realities to suit its purposes. Thus, the territories that are deemed occupied under international law became disputed territories, and essential issues such as the status of Jerusalem, borders and Palestinian refugees were assigned separate tracks and deferred indefinitely.

The second problem was that the agreement was an interim transitional one that did not define its ultimate aim. It was a roadmap that led to an unknown destination. As a result, the peace process became an activity aimed to lead the Palestinians into a void where they would roam endlessly in the wilderness of Israeli procrastination. The Oslo Accords accomplished more for Israel than Shamir had ever dreamed of. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

3) Will Israel still exist 90 years from now? Should it?

Bradley Burston, Ha'aretz, October 28, 2013

If there were an award for the one Israeli who has been ahead of his time for more years than absolutely anyone else, the short list of nominees would surely include Uri Avnery.

He was way ahead of his compatriots in the pre-state Irgun armed underground in 1942, when he broke with them over Irgun bombings that killed Arab civilians in retaliation for Arab attacks against Jews.

He was way ahead of the Israeli public when, recovering from serious wounds suffered as an Israeli soldier in the 1948-9 war, he "came out of the war totally convinced that one: we need peace, two: there exists a Palestinian people, and three: that making peace with the Palestinians means to have a Palestinian state next to Israel."

He anticipated official Israeli-Palestinian peace attempts by more than a decade when, at the height of the 1982 IDF siege of Beirut, he risked arrest and worse to cross battle lines in order to meet Yasser Arafat. It was said to be the first time the PLO leader had ever met an Israeli.

So it only makes sense that the 90th birthday last month of the journalist, politician, peace activist and trouble maker named Uri Avnery, would be marked this week with a panel discussion addressing the future.

Specifically, "Will Israel exist 90 years from now?"

Given this Israel, it is more than likely that, lurking behind the answers to the provocative discussion topic, a second question will emerge: "Should it?"

This week, listening more closely to Uri Avnery than usual, I've found to my surprise that I have an answer: Yes. And Yes.

Surprise, because of the volume and the persuasiveness of those on the left and right who agree on only one thing: there cannot be two states here. There will not be two states here. What they are telling us, in essence, is that long before 90 years is up, that which is democratic and Jewish about the Israel we know, will be eroded and dissolved into dust by settlements, segregation, demography, and diplomatic isolation.

There's another possibility, though. That a 90-year-old may still be ahead of his time. And also right, both about the future and the present.

To those who say that settlement expansion has already rendered impossible the evacuation of settlers and the creation of two states, Avnery told Ben Lynfield of the Christian Science Monitor ahead of the panel discussion: "You need a very strong [Israeli] government, but it can be done." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

4) Invisible victims

**James Zogby, Common Good Forum in the Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good
First published August 24, 2013**

For decades now, Christians have been the “invisible or ignored victims” of conflicts in the Middle East. At best, the US has paid scant attention as once thriving communities of indigenous Christians in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt have been attacked, threatened, or forced to endure indignity and hardship.

There are many reasons for this lack of attention to the situation of Arab Christians, with one principal factor being ignorance. Most Americans have so little knowledge of the Arab World, its history and people that they are unaware that these Christian communities even exist. This must be remedied, since without an understanding of the role played by Christians in the Arab societies of the Middle East, there can be no reasoned discussion about the past, present, and future of this region.

One striking example of this ignorance comes to mind. I once hosted a press breakfast in Washington for a visiting Palestinian priest from the Galilee. Since I had invited only reporters who covered religion issues, I hoped for an informed and thoughtful exchange.

A set of initial questions from the AP’s religion reporter established, early on, that the conversation would not be as productive as I had assumed. His questions made it all too clear that he was simply unaware of the existence of a Palestinian Christian community. He began by asking, “You say that you are an Arab Christian. But how can that be - aren’t they two different groups?” He followed up by asking “When exactly did you and your family convert to Christianity?”

The clergyman from the Galilee, without missing a beat or cracking a smile, replied quite simply “My relatives converted about 2,000 years ago.” He went on to describe the continuous Christian presence in the Holy Land since the time of Jesus, the role they have played in the region’s history, and their shared struggle with their Palestinian Muslim brethren.

I have found that not only reporters were ignorant or dismissive about Christians in the Arab World. About two decades back, a high ranking State Department official told me that he was off to Syria and high on his agenda was his intention to challenge “Assad’s and the Ba’ath’s persecution of Christians.” I cautioned him to drop that issue from his “to-do list” informing him that, in fact, Christians had been among the founders of the Ba’ath party and, for better or worse, saw the Assad regime as supportive of their rights—a history that had to be known if one was to understand Syria’s political culture and society.

Just a few years ago, I had another disturbing conversation about Syria’s Christians with a senior official—this time from the White House. We were in agreement about the brutality of the Assad regime and the need for fundamental change in Syria. But when I raised concern about the vulnerability of Syria’s Christians, his dismissive response was “Maybe it’s time for them to just pack their bags and leave.” He said this without any sense of concern for this community or for what Syria’s future might be like if it were to lose its Christian population. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

5) PLO official: Israel not serious about peace talks

Ma'an News Agency, November 5, 2013

Senior PLO official Yasser Abed Rabbo said [November 4] that Israel is not engaging in peace talks with PLO negotiators, the official news agency Wafa reported. "There is one party negotiating, and that is us, while the other party is not proposing anything that goes in line with international legitimacy and law," Abed Rabbo told Voice of Palestine radio. Israel "responds to us not at the negotiating table, but with its bulldozers, settler hooliganism and all kinds of violations in Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque and everywhere else," he added. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will try to salvage peace talks during a visit this week, but as yet there have been no "serious negotiations," Abed Rabbo said.

Israel issued tenders to build 1,859 settler homes in the occupied West Bank and annexed East Jerusalem on Sunday, ahead of a visit by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. Settlement watchdog Peace Now said that issuing building tenders was the last stage in the bureaucratic process and that homes could start going up shortly. "Within a few months they will choose the winning bids and the successful contractors will be able to start building within a number of weeks (after that)," the group's Hagit Ofran said.

Senior PLO official Wassel Abu Yousef said that the PLO was considering a "mechanism to go the Security Council and the UN against these new Israeli decisions, especially as there are international resolutions that consider settlements illegal." Whenever Netanyahu makes a small step towards peace, he makes two larger steps to make it harder to get to peace," Peace Now said. "The tenders that were published today (Sunday) ... will not only make the talks harder but would create facts on the ground that will make the two-state solution much harder.

Peace Now's Ofran said that of the sites offered for sale on Sunday, 700 were in the East Jerusalem settlement of Ramat Shlomo. Previous plans to build there were announced during a March 2010 visit by U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, sparking outrage in Washington, which had been trying to revive peace talks at the time.

6) Israel to build security barrier between West Bank and Jordan

Robert Taft, The Telegraph, November 3, 2013

Benjamin Netanyahu is planning to build a security barrier between the West Bank and Jordan in a move aimed at asserting Israel's control over the borders of a future Palestinian state. The fence would extend from the Dead Sea to near the southern Israeli city of Eilat and would reinforce Israel's determination to maintain a presence in the strategic Jordan Valley, despite fierce Palestinian opposition.

The Israeli newspaper, Maariv, reported that Mr. Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, had ordered work to begin as soon as another fence currently being built on the country's southern border with Egypt's Sinai Peninsula is completed. An Israeli official confirmed to The Telegraph that the barrier was under consideration but said that a final decision had yet to be taken.

Addressing Sunday's cabinet meeting, Mr. Netanyahu said a continued military presence in the Jordan Valley was "first and foremost" among Israel's security needs "in case the peace frays". "These security arrangements are important to us. We will insist upon them," he said. "First and foremost, the security border of the State of Israel will remain along the Jordan River."

The proposal provoked an angry response from the Palestinians, who portrayed it as an attempt to undermine John Kerry, the US secretary of state, who is due to visit Israel and the West Bank on Tuesday to bolster stuttering peace talks between the two sides.

"The Israeli premier's statements on building a wall in the Jordan Valley is only a proactive step to foil Secretary Kerry's visit," Nabil Abu Radeineh, a spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority president, told the Wafa news agency.

In another development certain to trigger Palestinian outrage, Israel issued tenders for 1,859 settlers' homes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank on Sunday, according to Peace Now, an Israeli anti-settlement group. The move came after Israel last week approved 5,000 new settlers homes as well as a national park in East Jerusalem in what was depicted as an effort to stave off Right-wing criticism of the release of 26 Palestinian prisoners, freed last Tuesday as part of an agreement concluded last July to re-start long-stalled negotiations.

One Palestinian official said the latest settlement announcement could provoke a Palestinian complaint to the UN Security Council, a decision that would almost certainly scupper the current talks.

"The PLO [Palestine Liberation Organisation] is considering a mechanism to go the Security Council and the UN against these new Israeli decisions, especially as there are international resolutions that consider settlements illegal," Wassel Abu Youssef, a senior PLO member, told AFP.

Speaking in Cairo, Mr. Kerry acknowledged that settlement-building threatened the talks' prospects. "I remain hopeful, and we will make every effort in the United States to move the process forward in a fair-handed way, a balanced way that reflects the complexity of these issues," he said. "There is no doubt... that the settlements have disturbed people's perceptions of whether or not people are serious and are moving in the right direction."

7) The two state illusion, racism in Israel, and Jewish hubris Mark Braverman's Politics of Hope Blog, October 30, 2013

On October 16 The Christian Century published my review of Rashid Khalidi's *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*. ([Here is the text of the review](#)). The fact that the Century reviewed Khalidi's book is an indication of the media's increasing willingness to present viewpoints that challenge the very basis of Israel as a Jewish ethnic nationalist entity. This shift reflects the reality that once you address present-day violations of Palestinian rights, you see that the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was the continuation of the program of ethnic cleansing that began in 1948 and continues to this day with the annexation and carving up of the West Bank and the inhuman siege of Gaza. You begin to understand that the dispossession of the Palestinians was the inevitable outcome of the project to set up a state for the benefit of one people. It is also becoming frighteningly clear that oppression and frankly racist policies on the part of Israel are not limited to occupied areas, but to the territory within the de facto borders of the State of Israel prior to the 1967 war.

Israel's new racism: A recently released documentary demonstrates this with horrifying vividness. Ali Abunimah, Palestinian writer and activist and publisher of the Electronic Intifada, has reported on a video entitled "Israel's New Racism: The Persecution of African Migrants in the Holy Land," produced by Max Blumenthal and David Sheen, a piece solicited — and then rejected — by the New York Times. According to Blumenthal, it has since gone viral on YouTube, with close to one million views. The ten minute piece documents vicious, racist attacks on African residents of Israel incited by prominent demagogues and several members of the Israeli Parliament. The piece presents voices, not only shrieking in public demonstrations but speaking calmly in office interviews, proclaiming that Israel is the land of the Jews and that non-Jews (especially those with black skin) are not welcome. The video is shocking — but it is not surprising. From our twentieth-century perspective, we understand all too well that ethnic nationalism breeds racism — that it is racism — and that oppression and violence — the bloody as well as the structural, state-sponsored kind — is the inevitable result.

In his recently published *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*, Blumenthal documents Israel's escalating move to the political right, into what many would describe as fascism. The problem, as I pointed out in my 2011 blog post about Peter Beinart and his brand of "progressive Zionism," (a piece accepted and then rejected by The Nation), is not the occupation, nor is it the religiously-based racism of fundamentalist Jewish settler-colonists — the problem is a state founded on an ethnic nationalist ideology. "The late and deeply mourned Tony Judt," I wrote then, "got it exactly right in his NYRB piece back in 2003: 'The problem with Israel [is that]...it has imported a characteristically late-nineteenth-century separatist project into a world that has moved on, a world of individual rights, open frontiers, and international law. The very idea of a 'Jewish state'—a state in which Jews and the Jewish religion have exclusive privileges from which non-Jewish citizens are forever excluded—is rooted in another time and place.'"

For over half a century, much of the world, with the U.S. in the lead, has accepted and supported this anachronistic and, by Judt's definition, illegitimate political entity. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

8) A Christian duty to take up the cause of Palestinian rights **Robert Cohen, Micah's Paradigm Shift, JFPFP, November 2, 2013**

This month the Jewish American writer and Israel/Palestine activist Mark Braverman publishes his second book, *A Wall in Jerusalem*. It follows *Fatal Embrace* in 2010 which quickly established Braverman as an important new voice in the Israel/Palestine debate. Below you can read Braverman's first interview to mark the new book's publication given exclusively to Micah's Paradigm Shift.

Braverman, who has deep family roots in Israel, has developed what he describes as a "calling" to speak to the Church in a spirit of Christian teaching that sees Jesus as a radical Jew rebelling against the Jewish establishment and the Roman occupation of first century Palestine. In his new book he successfully straddles Jewish and Christian theological thinking to create a shared dialogue of justice and compassion. Braverman is determined to articulate a Christian approach to Palestinian solidarity that counters evangelical Christian Zionism while remaining rooted in the teaching of Jesus. He also challenges the phenomenon of Christian post-Holocaust guilt that leads to a reluctance by the Church to confront Israeli injustice against the Palestinian people for fear of disturbing Jewish-Christian interfaith dialogue.

A Wall in Jerusalem is full of personal stories and the voices of Christian and Jewish, scholars and activists. Braverman's own story of his journey to an awareness of the Palestinian cause is as compelling as any in the book. For me the book holds many moments of great clarity including the insight that the Palestinian story has become not just "their narrative" but the defining narrative of Israelis and the Jewish Diaspora too.

Whether you are new to the issues or familiar with them you will find *A Wall in Jerusalem* an exceptionally rewarding and inspiring read.

An interview with Mark Braverman by Micah's Paradigm Shift (MPS)

MPS: In this book (*A Wall in Jerusalem*), more than in *Fatal Embrace*, it feels as if your primary audience are Christians grappling with what to think about Israel/Palestine. You talk about the difficulties you have experienced in raising the whole debate within synagogues but the warm welcome you have received in many churches. Have you given up on raising awareness within your own Jewish Community?

MARK BRAVERMAN: Awareness continues to increase in the Jewish community, but I see this as a separate issue from the mobilization of the churches as a grassroots force for changing government policy in the U.S. and among its Western allies. There are Jewish journalists, academics, and now even rabbis who are raising their voices, and grassroots Jewish peace groups such as Jewish Voice for Peace in the U.S. who are doing very important work with the Jewish community as well as presenting an alternative to those Jewish institutional voices who defend Israel against all criticism and claim to speak for all Jews. I simply have another calling, which is to speak to the churches.

MPS: What does that "calling" look like? What's the core message you want to put across to Christians and the Church? ...

[Read the entire interview here.](#)

9) NGO statement on the World Bank-sponsored Red-Dead Sea Canal Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR Gaza), November 1, 2013

The undersigned Palestinian NGOs call on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to halt all forms of cooperation with the World Bank-sponsored Red Sea - Dead Sea Conveyance Project (RSDSCP) and to take an unequivocal public stance of rejection to the project.

It has become clear beyond doubt that the project is an unacceptable attempt to force the Palestinian population to consent to their own dispossession and to compromise on their own rights.

Any lack of a clear position by the Palestinian leadership on this outrageous project, any stand of ambiguity or positive criticism towards it, contributes to the impunity that for far too long has allowed Israel to appropriate Palestinian water and deny Palestinians their rights.

Five reasons why the RSDSCP must be rejected:

1. The project undermines Palestinian water rights and legitimizes Palestinian dispossession from the Jordan River. Israel unilaterally controls the flow from the upper Jordan River and prevents Palestinians from making use of their rightful share of the lower river's water. This is the sole cause for the gradual disappearance of the Dead Sea. Instead of addressing Israel's water theft, the project aims to maintain the unjust status-quo of the river and allegedly "save" the Dead Sea through large scale Red Sea water transfer.
2. The project attempts to replace the river's natural fresh water appropriated by Israel from the upper Jordan River with desalinated Red Sea water sold at high costs to severely water-dispossessed Palestinians and at pitiful quantities. Even these sales remain merely an "option" and the World Bank studies plan to "supply" only Jericho, which is currently the only water-rich place in the occupied West Bank. With every drop of water that Palestinians purchase, they capitulate to their own deprivation.
3. Neither the World Bank's Feasibility Study (FS) nor its Environmental & Social Assessment study (ESA) address the grave damage to the West Bank Eastern Aquifer, currently the only source Palestinians have for water supply and development. The Eastern aquifer is rapidly depleting, and its water table is dropping at an alarming rate - both as a direct result of the shrinking Dead Sea. Consenting to the project entails closing an eye to the rapid destruction of the only other water resource in the Eastern West Bank. Instead, Israel should be held accountable for the damage it caused to this vital resource on which over one million Palestinians currently depend.
4. Far from "saving the Dead Sea," the RSDSCP will actually destroy the unique features of the Dead Sea and its ecosystem. Under the project, the Dead Sea is slated to turn into a dead, engineered pool of Red Sea water and desal brines, destroying this Palestinian and world heritage site.
5. Both Red-Dead studies (FS & ESA) and the entire conduct of the World Bank lack credibility and transparency, and make a mockery of the alleged consultation and participation process. Throughout the process, the Bank has systematically turned a blind eye to Israeli violations of Palestinian water rights. ...

[Read the entire statement here.](#)

10) [De-Developing Palestine](#) (from report #2)

Martin Karcher, Interfaith Peace Builders, November 4, 2013

For someone like myself who has been dealing with economic development issues in developing countries throughout the world, a visit to Israel/Palestine raises troubling questions about the strategy being pursued by the Israeli government in relation to the Palestinian Territories under its control.

When designing road projects for World Bank financing, for example, one of the main concerns is how to reduce vehicle operating costs, including travel times, for cars, trucks and buses. In contrast, in Greater Jerusalem and the West Bank, this consideration seems to apply to Israeli traffic only, and not to Palestinian vehicles which are often forced to take more circuitous routes, and travel on roads of significantly lower quality.

Similarly, in other parts of the world, a railway project would cater to all rail traffic, regardless of the ethnicity of the passengers, whereas here some of the new railway lines systematically bypass Palestinian neighborhoods.

In agricultural development, not only are Palestinians often kept out of land that originally belonged to them, either by the Separation Wall or through some complex regulatory mechanisms, but they are often prevented from cultivating the land for lack of irrigation water and access to seeds and extension services. In the worst cases, their land may simply be taken away from them and in extreme cases their olive trees may be uprooted and destroyed.

Similar situations exist in housing, where Palestinians have an extremely difficult time obtaining prohibitively expensive permits to build and may have their house demolished at short notice if built without proper permit.

These are just a few examples of the highly discriminatory regime confronting Palestinians and impeding the development of the Palestinian economy in Greater Jerusalem and the West Bank. Since the conditions are getting worse and worse, one can only conclude that the Israeli development strategy for Palestinians is a de-development strategy, something not seen since the time of colonization.

11) Interfaith Peace Builders report #4: “Witnessing harsh realities and reasons for hope” November 8, 2013

Report overview: In the waning days of the delegation the group visited Tel Aviv, Sderot, Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem. Delegates were exposed to the harsh realities of occupation (and state violence inside Israel), heard arguments for the need for civil society actions like BDS, and met activists whose perseverance and work for justice inspires hope.

The first piece below explores the call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS). After that, a poem dedicated to Palestinians. Next, the Karchers share their experience visiting the village of Al-Arakib in Israel -- a village that has been demolished over 60 times. The experience of passing through a checkpoint comes to life in Ariel Gold's description. Finally, visits to Hebron and the Tent of Nations lift up the ongoing struggle for freedom.

[You may read the full report online here.](#)

12) The State of Two States - Week of November 3, Israel Policy Forum, November 8, 2013

This week, Secretary Kerry visited the region with a diverse and complex agenda, in which the current Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were a top priority. The announcements of continued settlement building in the West Bank and discord on the Jordan Valley issue have caused tension between the parties, and some sources claim little progress is being made. However on Wednesday, Secretary Kerry announced an additional \$75 million in support of the Palestinian Authority's High Impact Micro-Infrastructure Initiative, bringing the total U.S. commitment to \$100 million. Finally, after a series of meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Abbas, and others, Secretary Kerry gave a candid interview on Israel's Channel 2 news where he emphasized that the peace process is essential not only to Israel's Jewish and democratic character, but also to avoid further violence and international isolation.

"It is clear to everyone that handling international pressure depends on the progress of the negotiations, and if the talks fail, it will give everyone interested in boycotting us every reason to do so. Everyone who wishes that [President Barack] Obama lose power must take that under consideration. Israel will also lose its power and the two are related." – Yaakov Amidror, outgoing national security advisor to Prime Minister Netanyahu, speaking at a ceremony marking the end of his tenure in office (Sunday, 11/3)

"There is no doubt... that the settlements have disturbed people's perceptions of whether or not people are serious and are moving in the right direction." – Secretary Kerry acknowledging the tensions surrounding continued settlement building (Sunday, 11/3)

"The Palestinians knew that we would build in the course of the negotiations. This was a clear part of the start of the negotiations, and they were told clearly that Israel would not put any restriction on construction during this period. All the Palestinian allegations that this is a violation are an attempt to create an artificial crisis." – Prime Minister Netanyahu quoted in Israel Hayom (Monday, 11/4)

"I meet for regular meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu as chairperson of the opposition... About the negotiations I can tell you that the picture we've seen this past week is very disappointing." – Shelly Yachimovich speaking to Israel Radio (Tuesday, 11/5)

"As a Jew, I tell you we can't take any risks. The Jordan Valley has to remain under Israeli sovereignty. I'm not talking about our claims from the Bible. I'm talking about safety. By staying here we protect the people in Tel Aviv and all of Israel. Something will happen between the Arab countries and Israel, this will be the defense line." – David Elhayani, who chairs a regional council representing more than 20 settlements, emphasizing the necessity of an Israeli presence in the Jordan Valley (Tuesday, 11/5)

"Along the Jordan Valley you have immensely rich agricultural land. It's hard to see frankly how in the future you're going to have a Palestinian state that doesn't include that." – Former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, who represents the Quartet of Middle East peacemakers and has been working on a Palestinian economic initiative, addressing the challenge of the Jordan Valley (Tuesday, 11/5)

[Read the entire entry on IPF's blog.](#)

13) Kerry warns of violence if peace talks fail **Israel News, November 7, 2013**

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry warned Thursday of a return to violence if faltering peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians ultimately fail. He also rejected suggestions that he scale back his ambition to salvage the talks and forge a final settlement and interim agreement.

Kerry has been shuffling ... between Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan in a frantic bid to get the peace negotiations back on track amid rising public anger among Palestinians over Israeli settlement activity and among Israelis over the release of Palestinian prisoners.

“What is the alternative to peace?” Kerry asked at a joint news conference with Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh. “Prolonged continued conflict. The absence of peace really means you have a sort of low-grade conflict, war.” “As long as the aspirations of people are held down one way or another ... as long as there is this conflict and if the conflict frustrates once again so that people cannot find a solution, the possibilities of violence” increase, he said.

Kerry appealed for Israelis and Palestinians to take the peace process seriously and for their leaders to overcome differences that have hamstrung the talks since they began three months ago with the goal of reaching a deal by the end of April, 2014. He acknowledged the hurdles, but said he was convinced that both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas were committed to the negotiations

“I am pleased to say that despite difficulties, and we all understand what they are, these discussions have been productive,” he said. “Both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas reaffirmed their commitment to these negotiations despite the fact that at moments there are obviously tensions over one happening or another or one place or another, whether it is in Israel or the territories,” Kerry said.

Responding to U.S. Secretary of State’s John Kerry’s remarks that failure of the talks would lead to an escalation in violence, Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon said “We should not fear threats of a third Intifada.” Ya’alon addressed peace talks with the Palestinians, saying it was an issue “that most likely does not have an immediate solution, but a long-term one.”

Earlier Thursday, Kerry told Jordan’s King Abdullah II that his meetings had “created some clarity on some of the points.” He did not elaborate, but said at the news conference with Judeh that there was “significant progress in our discussions about a couple of areas of concern in the panorama of concerns that exist.”

A statement from Jordan’s Royal Palace said Abdullah, a close U.S. Arab ally, said final status talks involve “higher Jordanian interest,” mainly a common border with a future Palestinian state, the fate of Jordan-based Palestinian refugees displaced in the 1967 Mideast war and Jerusalem, where the kingdom maintains custody over Christian and Muslim holy sites. The king also called on the international community to help end unspecified “Israeli unilateral actions in the occupied Palestinian territories because they are illegal, illegitimate and constitute a real obstacle to peace efforts,” the statement said. He was referring to Israeli government plans to build more settlements in the West Bank. ...

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14) Frustrated Kerry's peace critique a heavy slap in Netanyahu's face **Raphael Ahren, The Times of Israel, November 7, 2013**

A few days ago Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told his old friend John Kerry in Jerusalem that he was concerned about the peace process, and asked the visiting U.S. secretary of state to “steer [the Palestinians] back to a place where we could achieve the historical peace that we seek.” John Kerry quickly responded by lauding both sides’ “good faith,” and said he was “very confident” the negotiations would succeed.

But (the day after that conversation, he) loosened the diplomatic straitjacket, and we all got a much better look at what John Kerry really thinks about progress — and blame — in the new peace effort he worked so strenuously to revive a little over three months ago. He turned directly to the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and showed them rather more of his true colors. To the prime minister, it is safe to assume, they did not look particularly blue-and-white.

For the first time since he managed to restart the talks in July, Kerry dropped his statesman-like public impartiality, and clearly spoke from the heart — and what emerged were a series of accusations that amounted to a forceful slap in the face for Netanyahu. It was a rhetorical onslaught that the prime minister cannot have expected and one he will not quickly forget.

In an extremely unusual joint interview with Israel's Channel 2 and the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, a very frustrated Kerry basically blamed the Israeli government for stealing the Palestinians' land and the Israeli public for living in bubble that prevents them from caring much about it. If that wasn't enough, he railed against the untenability of the Israel Defense Forces staying “perpetually” in the West Bank. In warning that a violent Palestinian leadership might supplant Mahmoud Abbas if there was not sufficient progress at the peace table, he appeared to come perilously close to empathizing with potential Palestinian aggression against Israel.

“If we do not resolve the issues between Palestinians and Israelis,” Kerry warned early in the interview, “if we do not find a way to find peace, there will be an increasing isolation of Israel [and an] increasing campaign of delegitimization of Israel.

“If we do not resolve the question of settlements,” he continued more dramatically, “and the question of who lives where and how and what rights they have; if we don't end the presence of Israeli soldiers perpetually within the West Bank, then there will be an increasing feeling that if we cannot get peace with a leadership that is committed to non-violence, you may wind up with leadership that is committed to violence.”

He later elaborated, expressing apparently growing dismay over continued Israeli settlement expansion: “How, if you say you're working for peace and you want peace, and a Palestine that is a whole Palestine that belongs to the people who live there, how can you say we're planning to build in a place that will eventually be Palestine? So it sends a message that perhaps you're not really serious.” That was a critique that will have resonated widely among those many Israelis, and critics from outside, who have long argued that Israel should limit any settlement building to areas it envisages seeking to retain in a permanent accord. ...

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