

Ni'lin – a Struggle for Existence

The Struggle in Ni'lin

The village of Ni'lin has become a site of active struggle against the latest Occupation land grab. Frequent protests and confrontations between villagers and Occupation soldiers are staged on the site where bulldozers are razing land to build the latest segment of the Wall.

The local Popular Committee to Resist the Apartheid Wall has mobilized both residents in neighbouring villages as well as international activists, organizing a number of actions against the ongoing construction of the Wall. Weekly Friday protests as well as other actions during the week have slowed construction and brought considerable attention to the local struggle.

The actions against the construction have been met by force. Scores of people have been injured and arrested by Occupation forces. Bulldozers have uprooted a number of olive trees, while fires started by tear gas canisters have burnt others.

The heavy-handed measures of the Occupation have failed to break the resolve of Ni'lin, and the strength of the local solidarity between Ni'lin and the surrounding villages continues to grow.



Introduction

Ni'lin village is located in the West Bank, 26 KM to the west of Ramallah city. It lies at the centre of seven other villages: Al Midia, Qibya, Shoqba, Shebteen Budrus, Deir Kades, and Kharbatha Bani Hareth.

Historically, Ni'lin served as the centre of education, health, economic and public services for the surrounding villages. Ni'lin Secondary School is the top school in the area, and hosts students from several other villages. The village also has a small medical clinic, in addition to a number of factories that produce soft drinks, and rubber.

Continuous Land Theft

Until 1948, Ni'lin villagers owned 58,000 dunums (580 hectares: 1 dunum = 0.01 hectares) of land, which stretched as far as Ramle and Lod, cities that now lie inside the Green Line. After the Nakba of 1948, 40,000 dunums of this land were annexed to the newly created Israeli state.

Attempts of creeping depopulation

In 1948 there were 2,500 inhabitants living in Ni'lin. Today, 60 years later, there are some 5,000 inhabitants. Under normal growth rates, the population should be five times higher. But continuous land confiscations and resulting poverty and unemployment, together with closures, have led to

After the occupation of the West Bank in 1967, the settlements of Kiryat Sefer, Mettetyaho and Makabem were built on village lands. In addition, new roads were created for the ever-expanding settlements of Nili and Na'le. Together, these settlements and their associated apartheid infrastructure ate up another 8,000 dunums of Ni'lin's land.



Moreover, a military base for the Occupation and scores of military checkpoints were also set up in the area.

These confiscations left Ni'lin with just 10,000 of its original 58,000 dunums of land. Construction of the Apartheid Wall on the western side of the village and a military base on the

southern side will strip Ni'lin of a further 2,500 dunums of land.

In addition to this, the closure of the main entrance to the village to replace it with a tunnel running under the segregated settler-only road will involve the confiscation of a further 200 dunums. This will effectively turn Ni'lin into a prison, where

the Occupation Forces will have the power to open and close the tunnel to the village at whim.

Finally, this will leave the village with just 2,300 dunums, including the land on which the houses are built. The land to be confiscated includes prime agricultural land and hundreds of the olives trees.

continuous and forced displacement and many people had no other choice but to leave the village in search of work opportunities.

Destruction or colonization of the archaeological heritage

Several archaeological sites can be found in Ni'lin dating back to the Ca-

naanite period, including the al-Natof site that is thousands of years old, the Zebda site, the Shoqba caves, as well as castles and buildings that are five times older than the Israeli occupation. These sites are global cultural heritage, yet Israel is either destroying them day after day by building the Wall, or seeking to take control of these archaeological sites.

A tunnel to imprison Ni'lin

The Israeli army has informed the village about a new tunnel that it is planning to build at the entrance to Ni'lin on the western side of the village. Some 150 dunums of the village's land will be confiscated for this purpose. The current entrance will be closed, and the tunnel is to be built under Road 446 to take its place.

The **first aim of the tunnel** is to control the life of Ni'lin's 5,000 inhabitants and to cut them off from their links with the surrounding villages, and Ramallah city. It will be built on some of the village's best agricultural land, and will see the destruction of hundreds of olive trees that serve as a key livelihood for the local people.

The tunnel will divide the village into two parts: upper and lower Ni'lin. On one side 1,000 inhabitants living in the upper area will be isolated and prevented from accessing the lower area. This will mean that they will be cut off from health, education and other services in the upper part, as well social and kinship networks. Their movement will depend on the whim of Israeli soldiers, who will open the gate to upper Ni'lin for 45 minutes each day, like in Jayyous and other West Bank villages for example.

The **second aim of the gate** is to destroy the village's economy, and the **third aim** is to isolate farmers from their agricultural land.

Home demolitions

Since 1967, the occupation military has practiced daily crimes and human rights violations against Palestinians: killing, injuring and arresting them, stealing land etc. These violations also include house demolitions under the pretext that the owners do not hold the necessary building permits, despite the fact that they are built inside the West Bank.

The occupation forces have destroyed five houses in the surrounding villages in the past few years. Recently, the military in-

Theft of water resources

The private Israeli water company 'Mekorot' has controlled water resources in the West Ramallah district under authorisation from the Israeli military since 1967, effectively stealing the water from Palestinians and selling it back to them at inflated prices.

Additional water to Ni'lin and the surrounding villages is supplied by a well and springs located in Shebteen village. Yet even the amount of water that they can draw from these sources is controlled by the Israeli military. Meanwhile, settlers living in the surrounding settlements can access four times more water than Palestinians, and pay five times less for it than the Palestinian owners of the water sources. Villagers often face acute water shortages in the summer time because Israel cuts water supplies to the villages, forcing villagers to purchase tanks of water at high cost.

Apartheid roads

Over the years, hundreds of dunums of Ni'lin's land has been classified as Area C by the Israeli military, which subsequently allowed the construction of bypass Road 446 on these lands. The official pretext used to justify this confiscation and construction was that these roads would connect Ni'lin with the surrounding villages. Yet Palestinians have

formed 20 families in Almed that their houses will be demolished because they are built without permits, again, in spite of the fact that they are built on the people's own land.

Economic stranglehold

The rate of the unemployment has risen rapidly in the last few years as a direct result of land confiscation, closures and siege. Now, more than 80% of the villagers depend on wage labour in Israeli workshops and factories. The current closure policy of Israel, halt on work permits for Pales-

tinians to cross the Green Line the construction of the Wall, has lead now to an unemployment rate of approximately 60% (there are no official statistics yet). If the Wall is finished, it will be even harder for most villagers to reach their work across the Green Line, this number will be even higher. Agricultural land, which provides the primary source of income for the people of Ni'lin and the surrounding areas, is still being confiscated for the benefit of the surrounding settlements. This has left the people without a

secure source of income. The village of Ni'lin witnessed the confiscation of its lands for the establishment of five Israeli settlements that encroach on 1963 dunums, 13.3% of the village's remaining land. The settlements are a home to more than 40,000 Israeli settlers.

The village also suffers from the flow of wastewater from Israeli settlements such as Hashmona'im and the settlements inside the Green Line into its land. The flood of wastewater intersects with Ad Doyeh river that separates the village of Ni'lin from the village of Al Midya (South of Ni'lin).

Settlements

Following the extension of Israel's occupation to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, the successive Occupation governments adopted a policy of land confiscation for the establishment of settlements, apartheid roads and military bases.



Settlement Name	Date of Establishment	Population (2006)	Settlement area Inside village Boundary (D)	Total settlement Area (D)
Hashmona'im	1985	2400	934	1050
Mattityahu	1980	1400	661	683
Menora	1998	1804	20	759
Shilat	1977	376	74	978
Mod'in Illit (Qiryat Sefer)	1991	34500	274	3973
Total Area		40,480	1963	7443

Source: ARIJ GIS UNIT 2007

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secure source of income. The village has been turned from a breadbasket into a hungry population.

Yet, the dispossession has only strengthened resolve within the community to resist until the village lands are returned and dignity and justice are restored for the people in Ni'lin and Palestine at large.