



## **Sports Under Siege**

Israeli Transgressions against  
Palestinian sports



الإتحاد الفلسطيني لكرة القدم

# Israeli transgressions against Palestinian Sports

## Introduction:

Upon approaching the subject of Palestinian sports in general, and football in particular, it is almost universally acknowledged that this blossoming sport movement is faced by a number of deterrents and obstructions, amongst which the Israeli occupation stands out as the main restraining force.

Whether this occupation intends to hinder, destroy, impede, or control Palestinian sports is not the issue of this paper; rather, the author leaves the answer to this controversial question to serious researchers who are invited to explore, and then decide.

What this brief study observes are the methods relentlessly employed by the Israeli Occupation authorities that restrain the growth of football in particular, and sports in general, through a series of procedures, restrictions, and actions that we fall within 5 main categories:

## ISRAELI OBSTRUCTIONS TO PALESTINIAN FOOTBALL FALLS WITHIN MAIN CATEGORIES:

- I. **Infrastructure:** Banning the building -or hindering the completion of-stadiums and other infrastructure, and sometimes destroying existing ones.
- II. **Movement:** Restricting the movement of local or visiting players, officials, Board members, and Journalists in and out of Palestinian territories.
- III. **Hindering sport shipments:** By employing complicated procedures that delay or prevent receipt of course equipment sent by FIFA and the AFC, or donated by other Confederations and Sport governing bodies.
- IV. **Political intervention:** Interfering in the organization of friendly matches between Palestine and other Associations.
- V. **Human rights' violations:** Constant human rights infringements against athletes, many of whom were arrested, or even kidnapped, without reason.

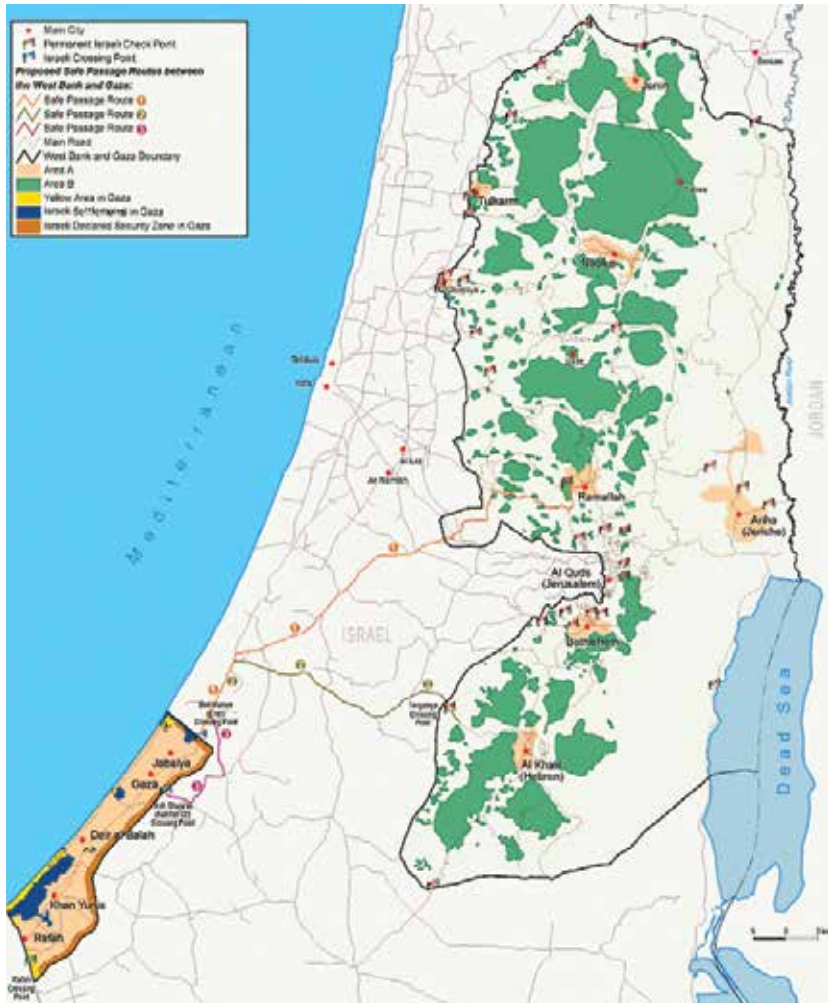
### 1. Obstructions to infrastructure:

#### 1.1 Overview: The building of sport facilities in Palestinian sport facilities is fully restricted by a number of factors:

- The limitations of “zoning” divisions imposed on Palestinian National Authority (PNA) as defined in the Oslo Agreement: (Area “A” with full civil and security control by the PNA, Area “B” with Palestinian civil and security control but with overriding Israeli security authority and Area “C” with full Israeli civil and security control).

- The PNA has full authority on only 17.9% of the West Bank and recently, in 2010, plans to build football artificial fields, financed by FIFA in places such as Burin, Beit Ummar and Beit Foreeq, were stopped by the Israeli administration for alleged “security reasons” due to the fact that the Israeli administration could do it because they were located in Areas “B” or “C”.

	<b>Initial Oslo Agreement</b> <b>(% of the West Bank)</b>	<b>Adjustment due to Wye River Memo.</b> <b>(% of the West Bank)</b>	<b>Current situation (% of the West Bank)</b>
<b>Area “A”</b>	2.7%	+1% transferred from Area “C”  +14.2% transferred from Area “B”	17.9%
<b>Area “B”</b>	25.1%	-14.2% transferred to Area “A”  +12% transferred from Area “C”	22.9%  Incl. 3% as non-buildable “Green areas/nature reserves
<b>Area “C”</b>	72.2%	-12 % transferred to Area “B”  -1% transferred to Area “A”	59.2%
<b>Total</b>	100%		100%



- In Area “C”, construction is constrained by a very restrictive planning regime implemented by the Israeli Civil Administration and even sometimes by using references to a restrictive interpretation of the British “Mandatory Regulations Plans” dating back to the 40's.
- Finally, the nature of the land broken down between the three Areas completely or nearly completely hinders the construction of sport facilities.
  - Area “A” includes all Palestinian cities and their immediate surrounding areas, meaning that there is a very limited amount of land available for building for example, a football field.
  - Areas “B” includes other housing zones such as smaller size cities, villages and some limited surrounding lands, and potentially available land for sport facilities, but projects are blocked for “security reasons”.
  - Finally, in Area “C” where most of the suitable land would be available for sport facilities, it is not possible to build.
- The documents requested by the Israeli authorities, to allow the building of sport facilities, include land ownership titles and deeds, detailed drawings of land levels, detailed drawings of the building, while the process is arbitrary without clear parameters nor deadlines:

## EXAMPLES:



- 1.1) 1. The village of **Beit Liqya**, close to Ramallah, received from FIFA a new natural grass football field in an already-existing football field, but while the village without any available land is fully in Area “A”, the field itself is partly located in Area “C”. As a consequence, the so-called issue of “coordination”, in fact the process to obtain a permit, was submitted to “security” considerations, and the project was forfeited.
- 1.1) 2. **Sa’ad Sayel Stadium** was A FIFA GP project to be built in Nablus. It was approved in 2009, and initiated in April 2012 in the presence of FIFA & PFA representatives. During the 1st phase of construction, an Israeli armed force, backed by the Israeli Civil Administration Office, and without any warrants,



stormed the construction site and ordered the halt to all construction work, under threat of arresting the workers and confiscating the machinery. It is to be noted that several meetings had been held between the Palestinian Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Israeli DCO in Nablus to coordinate the implementation of the project prior to the attack.

- 1.1) 3. **Beit Ummar Stadium/Hebron:** The Israeli side argued that the proposed stadium poses a threat on Israeli security, since it borders road #60, and in the event that 10.000 spectators were present, there was a chance they might decide to throw stones on the passing Israeli cars. They also said that such a number of spectators would cause a traffic jam in the junction and the main road. The Palestinian side proposed solutions to said security concerns, saying that the PNA will take responsibility whenever a game is staged, and will provide security forces in numbers enough to prevent any problems before they occur, that if they do. And, as a further precaution, a street will be paved by the Municipality from the northwestern side, which will be the main entrance to the stadium. No entrance will be made on the side of road #60, and no cars will be allowed to park on that side. Furthermore, the Palestinian side said it is possible to build a fenced wall on the side of road #60. The Israeli side stuck to their statements and asked that the Palestinian side chose another piece of land. Consequently, the PFA decided to move the GP from Beit Ummar to Burin, which is located in zone "A".

1.1) 4. **Burin:** Following the problem in Beit Ummar, the PFA selected the site of Burin (near the city of Nablus) which is within an area allotted to a school clearly located in zone “A”, all the documents requested by the Israeli side were given them. After a few days, an Israeli force stormed the location and blocked the preparatory works.

## **1.2) On more than one occasion, Israeli armed forces either destroyed or broke into stadiums and sport facilities:**

1.2) 1. During the Israeli war on Gaza, in November 2012, Israeli F16 fighters repeatedly bombarded the “Palestine Stadium” in Gaza, which resulted in severe damage to the Stadium's infra-structure. But this wasn't the only instance. The list of Israeli targets included:

- The Palestine Olympic Committee Building
- Ittihad Al-Shja'iyah Club
- Football Union Club
- Al-Shams Club
- Al-Shuhadaa Club
- Ahali Al-Nuseirat Club
- Khadamat Deir Al-Balah Club
- Shabab Jabalia Club
- Shabab rafah Club, and the Sports city
- Gaza Al-Riyadi Club
- Al-Hilal Al-Riyadi Club



- 1.2) 2. On the 23rd of August 2010, the security officer and maintenance staff of **Faisal Al- Hussein Stadium** were surprised by a sudden visit from an Israeli armed force following one of the matches. The force included 3 officers and 15 soldiers. They directed several questions to the stadium's security officer about the Stadium, the teams, and the security officers that were there during the match. The force left after their questions were answered only to return after midnight at 12:30 with a larger force that conducted a search of the players' change rooms. They departed and returned again at 3:00 am to take photos of the pitch and the stands from several angles.



1.2) 3. On the 4th of March, 2013, a joint force of Israeli special troops and intelligence officers broke into **Jabal Al-Zaitun** pitch, located in **Al-Tur** village, near Jerusalem, during an official U14 league match between **Jabal Al-Zaitun** and **Nadi ai-Moathafin clubs**. The fully-armed force threatened the two children teams, their parents, the staff and spectators that they will revert to the use of force and arrest them if they did not clear the premises at once. The Israeli force then closed the pitch and issued a warning that prohibits anyone from returning to the place in the future.



## 2. Restrictions on movement:

- Israeli checkpoints prevent players from moving freely between Palestinian cities
- Difficulty in bringing together all the national team players together for training obliges PFA to set up training camps outside Palestine.
- Players living abroad are refused permits to enter the Palestinian territories.
- Players from Gaza Strip are denied access to the West Bank.
- The occupation authorities delay players for long periods at the borders leading to Jordan .This is exhausting and negatively effects their performance.
- It's well worth noting that ,between the years 2002 and ,2004Israeli Authorities had banned every Palestinian under 35 years of age from travelling out of Palestine!



## 2.1) Movement between Gaza and the West Bank :

It is not permitted for Palestinians to freely move between Gaza and the West Bank .A permit from Civil Liaison Office (DCO ,(is needed for that .To obtain the permit ,a Palestinian is obliged to state the reasons for the visit ,and present an invitation ,and then wait for God-knows-how-much ;It can be 3 days ,a month ,or an eternity .Once the permit is obtained ,there's an expiry date to observe ,and a new procedure to go through for renewal.



One thing to be noted about the permit that a Gazan gets to visit the west bank ,is that the permit is city-specific,so if you were a Gazan who got a permit valid for Ramallah ,you would risk being deported back to Gaza if an Israeli check point caught you in the wrong city.

### EXAMPLES:

2.1) 1. Players **Asem Hussein Attallah Abu Assi**, **Ihab Mahmoud Hamad Abujazar**, **Ahmad Nasr Khalid Keshkesh** and player **Mohammad Shbair**, all residents of Gaza, have been denied entry to the west bank to join the national team in an international match 2010. **Shbair** and **Keshkesh** had to stay in Jordan for more than 3 months -since the national team's match in Sudan, in June 2011- before he was allowed to return to Palestine.



The PFA has lists of tens of players who were treated likewise by the Israeli authorities.

2.1) 2. On the 29th of September **3 PFA Board members from Gaza** were denied entry to the West Bank. It's worth mentioning that, until this moment, no Board meeting (that includes all board members from the west bank and Gaza) has been held in full in Palestine since 2008 due to

these Israeli restrictions. The only full meeting of the PFA Board was held abroad in Lebanon in 8/2/2012.





- 2.1) 3. In 21/4/2013, Israeli authorities, despite attempts of intervention by such countries as Denmark, prevented 23 runners from participating in the International Palestine Marathon in Bethlehem without giving any reasons for the ban.



## 2.2) Travelling abroad from Palestine (West Bank and Gaza)

An athlete is faced with one or many of these scenarios:

- If from Gaza, he or she may not get a permit from the Israeli side to get out from Gaza, and join the team in the west bank, so Gazan players have to travel separately and join their teams abroad.
- Israeli's check points may prevent a player from travelling at all.
- Facing obstruction at the border may result in players missing their flights.

## 2.3) Foreign officials, and team coaches:

- Foreign members of the coaching and training teams need permission from the occupation authorities to enter Palestine, which might take 1-5 months.

## EXAMPLES:

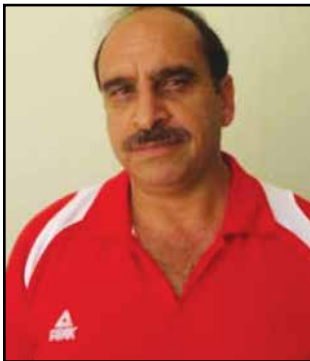
2.3) 1. FIFA instructor, **Mr. Nihad Souqar** has been denied a permit to enter Palestine and conduct a C Coaching course in 2009. The course was delayed as a result.

2.3) 2. On May 13, **2012, Mr. David Borja**, a high-ranking FIFA official was denied boarding his EL AL flight in Zurich by Israeli security! They said they did not have enough time to check his security background, and he had book another flight.

2.3) 3. On the 2nd of December 2012, Israeli authorities denied entry permits to 6 players and 2 officials from the Iraqi Air Force team who were supposed to play an official match against Al-Thahriyeh Club on the 4th of December.

2.3) 4. AFC Instructor Mr. Windsor John, an executive director at AFC, who was supposed to conduct an MO course in Ramallah from 26-28 February 2013, was denied an entry permit by the Israeli authorities without reason.

2.3) 5. The PFA Women department had to cancel one friendly match on 13/5/2013, and postpone the training camp (in preparation for the Women Asian Cup Qualifiers) on 15/4/2013 because Mr. Hani Majdoubeh, the Head Coach, was still waiting for his permit in Amman/Jordan. The PFA applied for the permit on 30/3/2013, and got it only on 12/5/2013.



### 3. Red tape customs procedures:

- Shipments enter supposedly through either Jordan or Israel via Israeli ports or Ben Gurion Airport.
- To obtain the release of this donated equipment, the Palestinian customs authority must provide the Israeli customs authority with the following documents so the latter can decide whether the equipment is released:
  - A letter from the donating sport institution stating the use of the shipment
  - A document indicating the name, the telephone number and the full address of the donor
  - A document indicating the name, the telephone number and the full address of the recipient
  - A letter from the Palestinian customs authority to the Israeli customs authority requesting the clearance and the release of the equipment
  - A detailed list of the shipment items with numbers of pieces for each item, size, brand, etc.
  - A document indicating the name ,the telephone number and the full address of the person or the company in charge of processing the clearance on behalf of the Palestinian recipient
  - Once this is settle ,the shipment has to go through a security check before it is allowed to be on its way to the recipient.
- In the past years ,on several opportunities ,donated equipment sent by FIFA and UEFA has not been received or was released only after the payment of exorbitant fees.

## 4. Interventions in the organization of friendly matches:

(Full record of the under said is in the safe keeping of the Palestine FA and is withheld from publication due to individuals' rights)

- 4.1) An agreement was reached in 2009 between the Palestine FA and two top Brazilian clubs to play a match of peace in Palestine on the 15th of September of the same year. The match was, however, cancelled under pressure from the "Israeli Confederacy" headed by one Fernando Lutenberg.
- 4.2) An attempt to organize a friendly match with Zambia in September-October 2011: The Israeli authorities interfered politically with the government of Zambia to discourage the playing of the match. (Full record of the available upon request), though an agreement was reached between the associations of Palestine & Zambia.
- 4.3) A 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt with Central Africa Republic in October 2011 was also thwarted through intervention on the highest political levels.
- 4.4) A 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt with Zambia on 17 November 2011 was cancelled upon instructions of some "State House".
- 4.5 ) A football team from South, which was supposed to participate in the Youth Week, organized by the Palestinian HCYS, cancelled its flights after being informed by the Israelis, via the Embassy of South Africa in Tel-Aviv, that Palestinian territories are "not safe".

## 5. Human rights' infringements:

The list of human rights' infringements, committed by the Israeli occupation, is endless. Sadly enough, these actions also come in total disregard of the basic rights stipulated in the FIFA statutes and the Olympic Charter, below are but a few examples.

### EXAMPLES:

5.1) Palestinian Sports lost the following athletes during the Israeli Bombardment of Gaza:

- **Khaled Al Abid Jaber:** President of the Pentathlon Union.
- **Ayman Al-Kurd:** Formed National Team player.
- **Wajeeh Mushtaha:** Al-Shijayah Union Club player
- **Ali Al-Hubbi:** Basketball player/ Khadamat Rafah Club.
- **Shadi Al-Sbakh:** Al-Nusseirat Club player.
- **Emad Al-Najjar:** Billiards Federation/player

5.2) Player **Mahmoud Kamel Mohammad Sarsak:** imprisoned by Israeli authorities for more than 3 years without trial ever since the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 2009. He was arrested by the Israeli forces as he was on his way from Gaza to the West bank to play with his new club, Markaz Balata. He was released last year after 90 days on a hunger strike, and was only released after the much appreciated intervention from the President of FIFA and other sport governing bodies.



5.3) On 24/3/2010, and in one of the holiest of the holy places for Muslims –Al-Aqsa Mousque, Israeli Police and Border Guard forces arrested the **Islami Silwan Club’s** head Coach, **Jamil Abbassi**, and threatened him not to partake in any sport activities. He was re-arrested again in 21/2/2012 for the same reasons.





5.4) On 4/2/2011, Israeli Police forces arrested the Chairman of **Silwan Club, Mr. Ma'moun Abbassi**, and threatened him of permanent arrest if he partakes in any sport activities in Silwan/ Jerusalem. He was re-arrested in 10/2/2013, and led to an interrogation camp south of Jerusalem, where he was banned from partaking in any sport activities. It's worth mentioning that Mr. Abbassi is now subject to house

arrest, and is banned from carrying out his duties as chairman of his club.

- 5.5) On 23/10/2011, Israeli special forces, accompanied by Israeli police arrested **Mr. Kifah Sarhan**, Board Member of the **Islami Silwan Club**, right from where he works in Beit Hanina/ Jerusalem. The arrest was followed by Israeli forces storming into Mr. Sarhan's house, kicking out its residents and messing with the contents of the house.
- 5.6) **Omar Khaled Abu Rweis**, the 24 years old Goal Keeper of the Palestine Olympic team, was abducted by an under- cover Israeli military force from his work, in the Palestinian Red Crescent, without charges. He is still in detention since the beginning on February 2012.
- 5.7) Player **Mohammad Saadi Ibrahim Nimer**, 23 years old, who plays for Al-Amaari professional club was arrested by Israeli occupation forces in the end of February 2012 and is still detained without charges or trial.



5.8) On 29/9/2012, a player in **Jabal Al-Mukabber** club, Ibrahim Wadi, was arrested on his way to Bethlehem where he was headed with his team for a professional league match. He was deported to Gaza from there.

5.9) On 23/10/2012, Israeli Intelligence Forces, accompanied by Israeli Border Guard Forces, besieged the **Islami Silwan club** in east Jerusalem and gave them an order to close the club, under threat that any members who participates in sport activities will be arrested. The club had to withdraw from the 3rd class league after this order. It's worth mentioning that, in March, 2013, the ban was renewed for another year.



1.10) On 26/10/2012, player **Imad Abbassi**, who plays for **Nadi Al-Muwathafin Club**, was arrested by Israeli police and placed under house arrest, after being subjected to 6 successive arrests. It's worth mentioning that the abovementioned player used to play for **Nadi Silwan**, and had transferred to **Al-Muwathafin** club after the forced closer of his former club.





5.11) On 16/12/2012, and in the old city of Jerusalem, an employee of Al-Muwathafin Club, Mr. Nehad Sugayyar, was assaulted by a group of Orthodox Israelis, under the eyes of Israeli police who –needless to say- refrained from intervening. He suffered several burns and bruises from said attack.



5.12) PFA Board Member **Mohamad Abu Swaiy**, was detained by Israeli Police on 29/8/2012 for 6 hours. He was warned not to partake in any sport activities in the occupied city of Jerusalem.



5.13) **Ms. Mona Barbar**, an employee in the Palestinian Higher Council of Youth & Sport, was arrested by the Israeli Authorities in 1/3/2013 with other people. Her charge was “organizing sport activities in east Jerusalem”.

5.14) On the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, 2013, an Israeli armed force broke into Faisal Al-Husseini Stadium, wrought havoc in the place and then savagely beat up a maintenance employee before taking him by force to an unknown location. The military armed force was preceded by another force in civilian clothing, also armed, who took photos of the location before the other force arrived.



5.15) In February 2013, Israeli troops arrested 16 children who were playing football in the pitch of their school located in the village of "Tel", near the city of Nablus. The boys learned that Israeli forces had kidnapped two of their group near the pitch, and had gone outside to see what happened when the whole group was kidnapped and taken to a military detention camp in Huwwarah. They were only released late at night, after lengthy talks between the Palestinian civil office and the Israeli military.

These are only but few examples of what the Palestinian sports movement suffers as it tries to grow and take its place under the sun, as is the case with every other nation on the face of our planet.

