



## **Campaign for the Right of Entry/Re-Entry to the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

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*A Grassroots Campaign for the Protection of Foreign Passport Holders Residing in and/or visiting the occupied Palestinian territory*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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### **Call for an immediate end to Israel's discriminatory visa-freeze policy**

Ramallah  
Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt)  
September 8, 2006

More than 70 journalists, activists, and members of the diplomatic corps met on September 6 at the Ambassador Hotel in Jerusalem for a press conference regarding the Campaign for the Right of Entry/Re-Entry to the occupied Palestinian territory.

The event was organized in conjunction with the Israeli-Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI). The purpose of the press conference was to engage Israeli officials on the issue in the presence of foreign representatives. No Israeli government representatives, however, were present. A US consulate spokesperson emphasized that the consulate was aware of the visa freeze policy and that the issue was being raised at the highest levels.

IPCRI co-director Gershon Baskin and campaign activist Sam Bahour outlined the current status of Israel's so-called "viza-freeze policy", which is being broadly applied at the Israeli controlled border crossings to the occupied territory a few months ago. "This is one of the more blatantly unjust and blatantly stupid things the government of Israel has ever done," said Baskin.

The policy denies entry to foreign nationals wishing to be in the territory and to associate with Palestinians in any capacity. This is done under the pretext that said foreigners must acquire a visitor's permit beforehand, but hardly any permits are being issued.

Scores of people carrying foreign passports have been cut off from family, friends, property and work. Most harshly affected are foreign national spouses of Palestinian ID holders, who must rely on 3-month tourist visas to legalize their stay, because Israel does not issue permanent residency status to those wishing to live in the West Bank and Gaza.

Since the start of the Al Aqsa Intifada in September of 2000, Israel has stopped accepting Palestinian applications for family reunification in the West Bank and Gaza as one method of controlling Palestinian demographics. According to B'Tselem, Israel has practiced this method of control on and off since 1967 and now has a back-log of at least 120,000 applications it is refusing to process. Israel, not the Palestinian Authority, is and has always been in control of the Palestinian population registry.

Campaign representative Anita Abdullah spoke about the political nature of the freeze policy and the need to find a political solution that would combat the policy itself, not just individual cases of discrimination.

Antigona Shkar of B'Tselem presented findings and individual video testimonies from a joint B'tselem-HaMoked report, published in August, entitled "Perpetual Limbo: Israel's Freeze on Unification of Palestinian Families in the Occupied Territories." -MORE-



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### **Israel's visa-freeze policy (page 2)**

Prominent Palestinian businessman Zahi Khouri (chairman of the National Beverage Company) spoke of the ramifications of the freeze policy on the Palestinian business community and called on foreign missions to press Israel to end its closed door policy.

Campaign for the Right of Entry/Re-Entry to the oPt representative Basil Ayish called for action targeted at foreign representative offices as well as the Israeli government. "We declare our insistence on the most basic human rights," he said. "We demand that Israel immediately stop separating Palestinian families; we demand that Israel stop discriminating against those wishing to enter Israeli-occupied territory, and we expect embassies to protect and defend their citizen's rights to travel freely through Israeli ports."

For a comprehensive report on the meeting, go to <http://www.ipcri.org>.

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