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ABOUD AND THE INTERNAL SECURITY BARRIER

23 June 2006



About and the Internal Separation Barrier

23 June 2006

Background

About is a Palestinian village in the West Bank, located 15 miles northwest of Ramallah and two and a half miles from the Green Line (1949 Armistice Line). About has a population of 2,500 residents, which includes 361 families. Residents of About are both Christians (Catholic, Orthodox, and Church of God) and Muslims. Christians comprise 52% of the village.

In About, there are four schools and three kindergartens. The village has a Catholic Boy Scout group, comprised of more than 200 members. Every family in About owns land with olive trees. Families invest significant capital in olive trees and produce olive oil for personal use and commercial sale.

Separation Barriers in About

In 2005, the Israeli government completed construction of the Separation Barrier along the Green Line near About. This Separation Barrier prevents Palestinians from entering Israel from the About region. However, in November 2005 the Israeli government began construction on yet another Separation Barrier near About. This internal Separation Barrier is being built east of the Green Line, closer to About. The internal Separation Barrier will adjoin the nearby Israeli settlements of Beit Arye (1/2 mile from the nearest home of About) and Ofarim (1 mile from the nearest home of About) to the Ariel settlement block. The Israeli government considers this internal Separation Barrier a part of the general project of the Barrier in the West Bank and claims the Separation Barrier is based on military reason and special security steps to prevent terrorist operations¹.

To construct this internal Separation Barrier, the Israeli government will destroy more than 1,100 thousand olive trees on 50 acres of Palestinian

¹ According IDF Expropriation Order # 05/170 T, from the Head of Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Judea and Samaria, issued to the Palestinian landowners of confiscated About land, 15 October 2005.

land. Additionally, the internal Separation Barrier will cut off 650 acres of land from the village, drastically limiting the space available for grazing flocks and for future village growth. One third of the families from Aboud own land that will be directly affected by the internal Separation Barrier. Many of the landowners are Christians and one is an American citizen.

The internal Separation Barrier will also confiscate an aquifer that supplies nearly one-fifth of the West Bank's total water supply. Furthermore, the Israeli government plans to expropriate another piece of land (Hill 422) just east of the Beit Arye settlement and east of proposed internal Separation Barrier. This hill contains a natural spring. The Israeli high court stated that the Israeli government plans to erect a military outpost and road on the hill².

The internal Separation Barrier will cut off Aboud from surrounding villages, obstructing movement of people, goods, and services between villages. As the Mayor of Aboud wrote to Pope Benedictus 16th, "the building of the wall will affect the residents of the village environmentally and psychologically."

When the internal Separation Barrier is complete, the Israeli military will enforce a 100-meter buffer zone on the east side of the internal Separation Barrier, preventing Palestinian farmers from accessing land in these perimeters. Furthermore, Israeli military personnel will have power to deny Palestinian farmers access to land located between the internal Separation Barrier and the Green Line Separation Barrier³.

² Israeli High Court, Response to File #05/11651 and #06/1988. 21 May 2006. The decision also indicated that if security reasons dictated, Hill 422 could be annexed by the Israeli military in the future.

³ In areas where the Barrier has been constructed, the IDF issued military orders in September 2004, creating a strip averaging 150-200 meters on the West Bank sides of the Barrier. In this strip, new construction is prohibited. [...] On 7 October 2003, the IDF issued a number of military orders declaring 'closed' land areas between the Barrier and the Green Line in the Jenin, Qalqilya and Tulkarem districts. [...] The Barrier will further restrict farmers living outside closed areas from reaching their land. [...] Where the Barrier has been constructed, Palestinians face economic hardship from being restricted from or not being able to reach their land to harvest crops, graze animals or earn a living. [...] "Barrier Route - February 2005. Preliminary Analysis of Humanitarian Implications. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, pg.2-3, 22 March 2005.

Christian Population

As the residents of Aboud will be deeply affected by the internal Separation Barrier, so too will the Christian presence in the Holy Land. The Separation Barriers will exacerbate emigration of Palestinian Christians from Aboud.

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Roman Catholic archbishop of Washington D.C., spoke with President Bush and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley about Aboud. On 10 March 2006, Cardinal McCarrick visited Aboud and expressed his concerns about the internal Separation Barrier. The Roman Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michael Sabbah, led prayers next to the internal Separation Barrier construction site in December 2005. Sabbah said, "with our faith and love, we demand the disappearance of the Wall and we affirm that is a mistake and an attack against our lands and our properties, a mistake and an attack against friendly relationship among the two people." The Vice Secretary of State of the Vatican Mon. Parolin is also following the developments in Aboud.

Israeli Settlements on Aboud land

In the 1980s, the Israeli government built the settlement Beit Arye on approximately 160 acres of land confiscated from Aboud. A few years later, the Israeli government confiscated an additional 140 acres from Aboud for construction of the Israeli settlement Ofarim. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics in Jerusalem, in 2003, Beit Arye had a population of 2,522 people and Ofarim 870 people.⁴

These settlements are located on land considered strategic to the Israeli government. "The area has a view of Ben-Gurion's flight patterns, and on a good day one can stand at the Sharon observation point in Beit Aryeh and see from Hadera to Ashkelon. It is referred to as the country's "Watchtower" and is named for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who supported Beit Aryeh's establishment and often brought groups to the hilltop to survey the area."⁵

⁴ Source: List of Localities: Their Population and Codes. Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1999-2004.

⁵ "Exclusion from fence irks settlers", Lazaroff, Tovah, The Jerusalem Post. 7 Nov 2005.

In December 2000, Israeli settlers burnt and uprooted 4,000 olive trees belonging to residents of Aboud. On October 7, 2005, Israeli settlers uprooted 500 grape vines belonging to residents of Aboud.

Aboud Village Responses to Separation Barriers

In October 2005, the Aboud local council petitioned the Israeli High Court to stop the work of the internal Separation Barrier or, to move the Barrier to the west. The council stated that the damages resulting from the confiscation of land, the uprooting of 1,100 olive trees, and the restricted access to lands west of the Separation Barrier will have devastating effects on their rights surrounding land ownership and access.⁶

Palestinians from Aboud also note that they have had nonviolent relations with the settlements of Beit Arye and Ofraim for years. Many villagers worked in the settlements until 2001, when new Israeli rules prevented Palestinians from working in the settlements.

Beginning in November 2005, Palestinians from Aboud organized non-violent demonstrations near the building site of the internal Separation Barrier. The village also continues to share information about the Separation Barrier with journalists, religious figures, and governmental personnel.

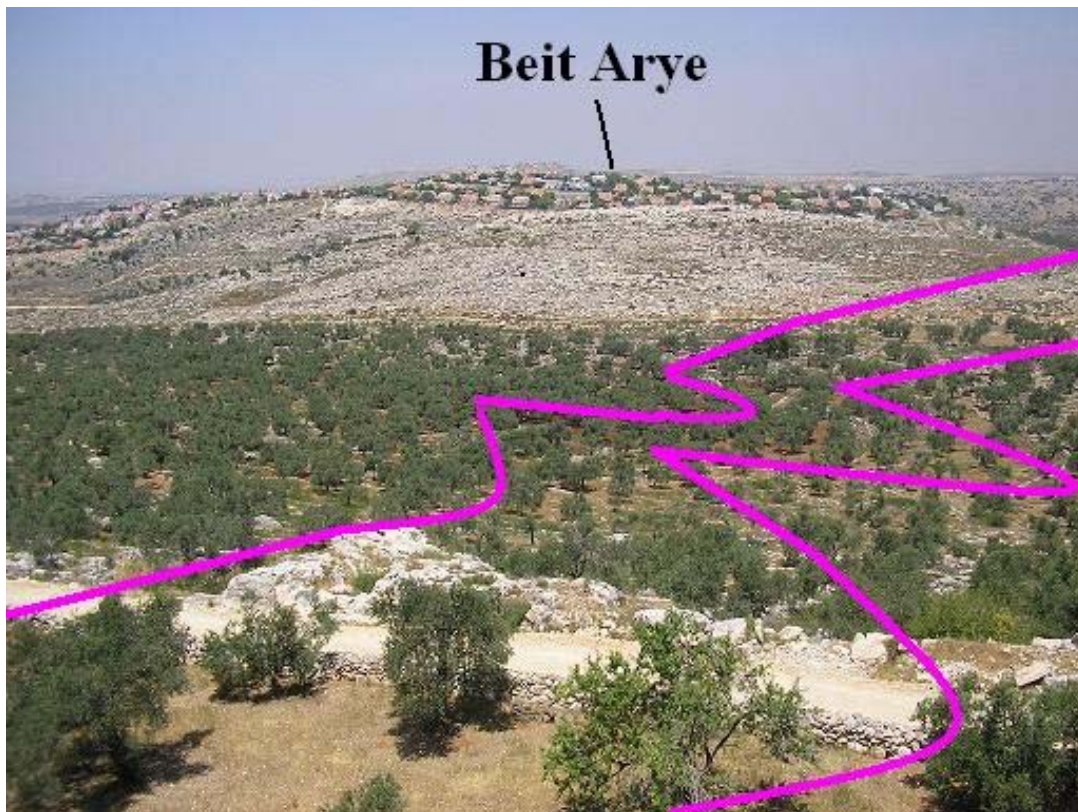
Latest Developments

In March 2006, the Israeli High Court ordered work on the internal Separation Barrier to stop. In May, the High Court ruled that the route of the internal Separation Barrier fulfills the Israeli military's duty to balance the security needs of the Israeli settlements with the rights of the Israeli citizens (settlers) and Palestinian citizens of the area. The High Court ruled for the work to resume.⁷

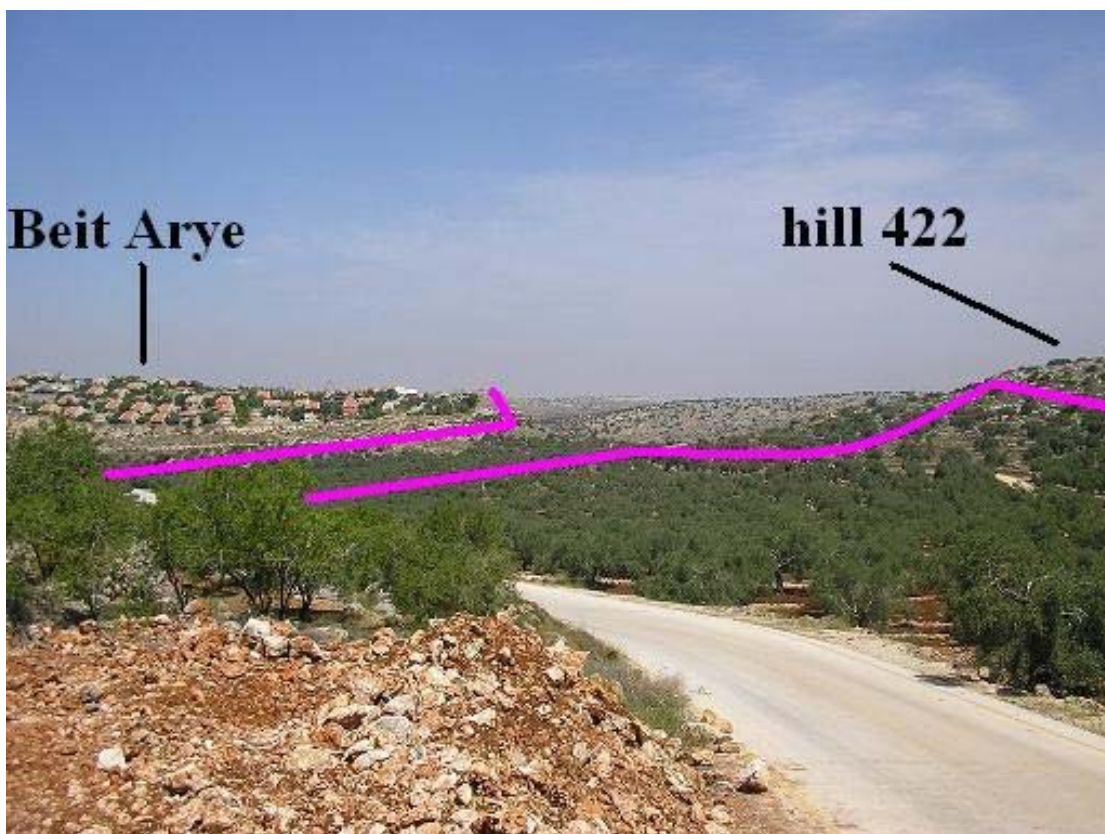
The work of the Separation Barrier will start any day, and with the commencement of the work, the 1,100 olive trees will be uprooted.

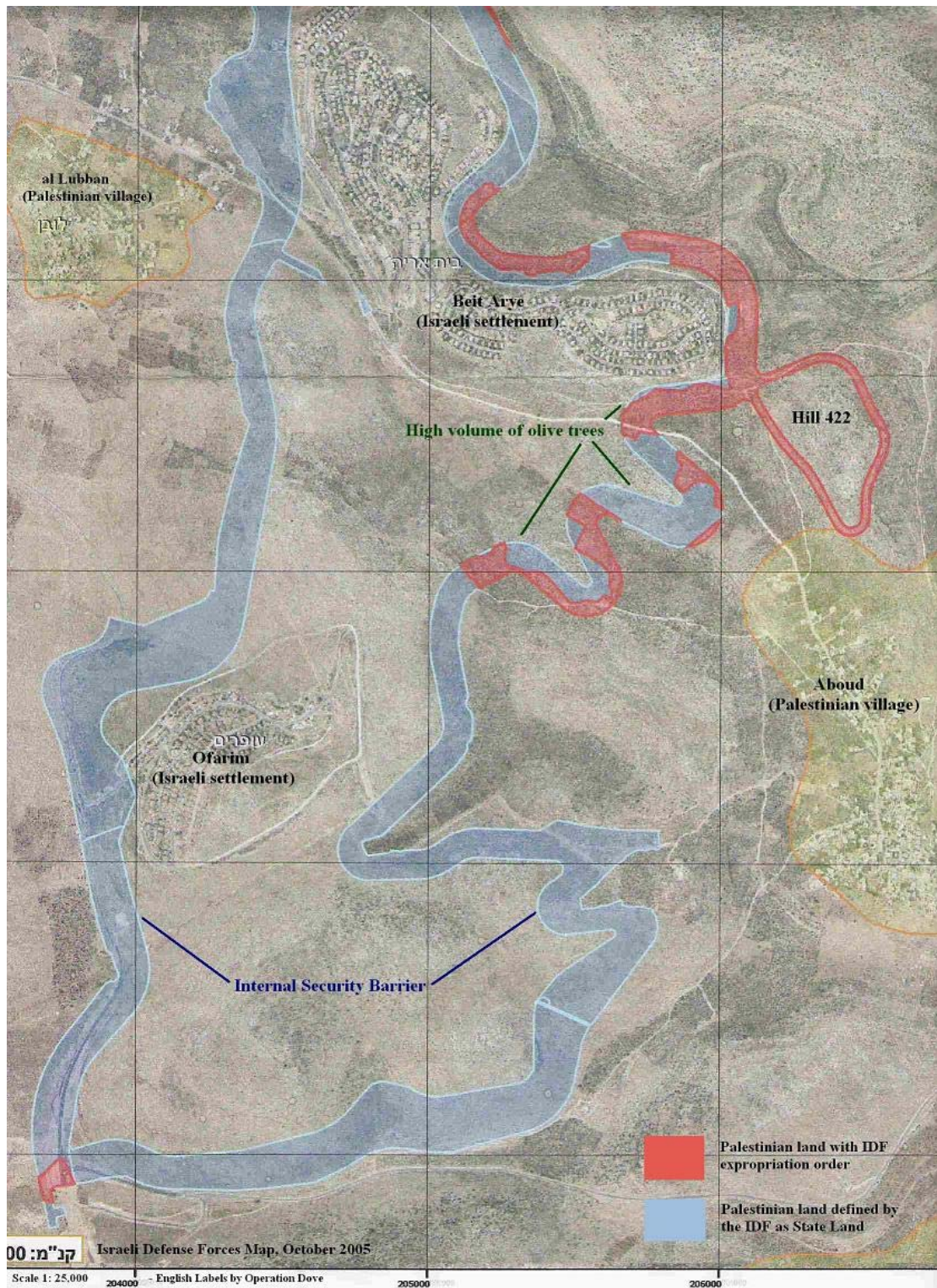
⁶ Israeli High Court, Response to File #05/11651 and #06/1988. 21 May 2006.

⁷ Israeli High Court, Response to File #05/11651 and #06/1988. 21 May 2006.



The internal Separation Barrier (seen in pink) will destroy all the olive trees in its path.





This document was compiled by Operation Dove, an Italian project of the Catholic Community Pope John XXIII. Operation Dove has maintained a nonviolent presence in Aboud since August 2004. (Contact: npcod@gmx.net)