

The Occupied Working With The Occupiers

The Sacrifices We Make

anonymously submitted

In Gaza, the parents of children receiving cancer treatment abroad are denied travel permits to accompany them. Thousands of Palestinians have not had the privilege to visit their capital and the holy sites that lie within it, from the Aqsa Mosque to the Nativity Church, even if it is only a half-hour drive away. Few Palestinians have had the opportunity to leave the country in pursuit of higher education, and

even fewer have had the chance to return home after decades of displacement.

The violent and systemic occupation of Palestine's land, water, and air is affecting Palestinians in every aspect of their lives, leaving them vulnerable to poverty, hunger, and basic human rights violations. Palestine ranks number four in the world for the highest unemployment rate at a staggering 25.9%. This

economic condition is a result of Israel's meticulous restriction of all Palestinian exports and imports, limitation of humanitarian aid that enters the country, and prohibition of entrepreneurship and investments within the country. Furthermore, the occupation keeps Palestinians undereducated and thus unemployed by forcibly shutting down or violently raiding schools and universities to retaliate against

political resistance. This creates younger generations of illiterate Palestinians who are confined to more laborious, less skilled work, thereby creating the perfect conditions for cheap manual labor within the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Consequently, the monthly income of Palestinians in Gaza is only an average of 682 Israeli New Shekel (ILS) (~207 USD), and an average of 1,062 ILS (~323 USD) for Palestinians in the West Bank.¹ This is not nearly enough to live comfortably while supporting a family of four in Palestine, where the estimated monthly costs are \$2,287.4 (8,235.6 ILS), not including rent.²

Under these uninhabitable economic conditions, Palestinians commonly resort to one of two options: leave Palestine in hopes of achieving better employment, or work in the higher-paying occupied Palestinian territories (OPT), the

invaded Palestinian lands that permanently displaced around 1.8 million Palestinians total since 1948.³ In contrast to the low average monthly salary in the West Bank, manual work in OPT reaps an average monthly income of about 5,500 - 6,000 ILS (~1,530 - 1,670 USD).⁴ To work in the OPT, approximately 110,000 Palestinian laborers pay about 2,500 ILS (\$700 USD) each for Israeli work permits—a little piece of paper wrapped in a protective plastic that the Israeli government has mandated for Palestinians to obtain to legally work in OPT.⁵ The Israeli government has forced Palestinians to obtain a variety of individual permits in the West Bank that govern a wide array of their activities, such as color-coded documentation for identification distinguishing Palestinians that live in the West Bank and Gaza from those living in East Jerusalem. This form of identi-

fication and legal limitation of movement was a technique used in the apartheid of South Africa and serves as a continuous reminder of the infringement of Palestinian freedom and mobility within their land.⁶

Up until just the beginning of 2021, Palestinians could only obtain work permits directly from their Israeli employers. This rule meant that Palestinians could not negotiate to change employers, even after workplace or human rights violations. This complete dependence on Israeli employers for employment gives the employers full freedom to do with their employees as they wish, with no legal consequences. The social protection system of workers in the OPT, regulated by the International Labour Organization, fails to effectively provide income security, healthcare, unemployment and maternity insurance, and standard labor rights for Palestinian

workers.⁷ In pursuing work in OPT, Palestinians are under no protection as laborers, whether that be compensation for physical injury in work, paid sick leave, employment protection, or freedom to quit or change jobs. Additionally, Palestinian workers can be revoked of their working rights if they cannot pay the continuously increasing permit price due to the rising occurrence of “permit trading,” a trade that was worth \$122 million ILS (~\$34 million USD) as of 2018, in which illegal permits are bought for the highest bid price. Other Palestinian workers’ permits have been revoked—without reimbursement of the money paid to obtain them—as

collective punishment of their villages for when some form of violent resistance occurs after the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) raided their neighborhoods.

There is no right or wrong in the opinions concerning Palestinians working in occupied 1948 Palestinian land. There is only a question of survival and what one is willing to do to ensure the well-being of one’s family.

“What else do we have to do?” asked a Palestinian I interviewed. “If you work in Palestine, how will you be able to raise your family?”

Palestinians are calling for the Palestinian Authority, the body that governs the OPT, to

better regulate the working standards and protections of laborers within the OPT, by ensuring more stable wages, health insurance advantages, and more. However, there is so little the government can do under the choking grasp of the occupation. Palestinians also understand, as stated by the interviewee, that there is a great distinction between Palestinians that work in the OPT and work with the Israeli government.

“They don’t enjoy what they’re doing, of course, but it’s better to keep Palestinians employed than starved, even if you are building settlements on land you know is yours,” the interviewee lamented.



This is the sacrifice you make to survive.

