

Today is no ordinary day

The half-century milestone has arrived. Today, we mark 50 years since the occupation began. In many ways, it's just a regular day, no different than any other. Yet the symbolic value of this particular day obliges us all to stop and take a long hard look at reality.

It is a reality in which a third and fourth generation of Palestinians don't know what it's like to live free; and a third and fourth generation of Israelis don't know what it's like not to be occupiers. It is a reality in which Israel controls 13 million people in the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, but only eight million of them actually count or can take part in determining the future here. It is a reality that no matter how you tilt your head at it means that Israel cannot be called democratic.

How has the occupation managed to reach the 50-year mark?

Perhaps because we manage to convince ourselves that it's all temporary: it's just another "bout of fighting", just another election campaign, just "until there's a Palestinian partner", and besides, the signing of a final status agreement is just around the corner. But Israel's governments have never considered the occupation temporary. For years and years, Israel has been acting as though the land – without the Palestinians living there – is ours forever, and is there for us to use as we please.

Perhaps it's because the occupation doesn't really affect us in our day-to-day lives as Israeli citizens: we created a law enforcement system that ensures that none of those responsible for the continued occupation or its attendant human rights violations will be held accountable. We've also managed to amend the law so that we almost never have to pay out damages to any Palestinian harmed by our actions. Then, so that we can also feel that we're completely in the right, we get a legal stamp of approval, mostly from the Supreme Court, greenlighting everything that happens under occupation: the land grab, roadblocks, home demolitions, a ten-year blockade on the Gaza Strip, to name but a few.

Or perhaps it's because none of this stands in the way of continued widespread international support for Israel. This international context also plays a role in us not having to bear any costs for the occupation: the fact that there is no price to pay is the basis underlying the past fifty years.

The occupation must end. This reality – wherein we control millions of people, whose lives are subject to our wants and needs – is entirely unjustifiable and unacceptable, not even by citing security considerations which now ring hollow. A continuation of the situation wrongly called the “status quo” ensures one thing, and one thing only, for whoever lives on this piece of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean: a continued downward spiral into an inherently violent, unjust and hopeless reality.

Human rights are not some obscure legal term: the fight to uphold them must be anchored in reality. The present reality of June 2017 is not the same as that of a generation or two ago, or of fifty years ago. This is why we at B'Tselem have modified our approach. The changes we've made are not the result of despair, but rather an expression of hope that is based on a factual and realistic understanding of situation. In our view, reporting the truth combined with international action that resonates locally are what may bring about a non-violent resolution to the present reality: this is the objective we are committed to and are working towards. Otherwise, the violence of the past half century - both organized and spontaneous - might be just a preview of much more to come.

The effort to achieve a different future here is not only a pressing moral task, lives depend on it. Working together we trust that we will yet see the realization of a different future, one based on liberty, equality and human rights.

Sincerely yours,

The B'Tselem Team