



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Palestinians in Bil'in Protest Construction of Israeli Separation Barrier, 2005-2011

2005

2011

**Country:** Palestine

**Location City/State/Province:** *Bil'in Village, West Bank*

**Goals:**

To save their village and farmlands from increasing Israeli encroachment by preventing the construction of a separation barrier that cut through Palestinian territory.

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

**Methods in 4th segment:**

**Methods in 5th segment:**

**Methods in 6th segment:**

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 025. Displays of portraits
- 026. Paint as protest
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 184. Defiance of blockades

### Classifications

**Classification:**

Defense

**Cluster:**

Democracy  
Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- International Activists
- Palestinian Villagers
- Pro-Peace Israeli Activists

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Popular Struggle Coordination Committee; Abdulla Abu Rahma, a teacher and organizer; Mohammed Khatib, coordinator of West Bank Coordination Committee

**Partners:**

Bil'in Local Council Leader Ahmed Issa Abdullah Yassin, Stop the Wall Campaign Activists, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad

**External allies:**

Members of The Elders Organization including former US President Jimmy Carter, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ela Bhatt, Gro Brundtland, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso; Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi; Martin Luther King III

**Involvement of social elites:**

Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad publicly supported non-violence as a method for Palestinian resistance; Members of the Elders Organization visited Bil'in in August 2009 and commended the Palestinians' non-violent efforts to protest the separation barrier; Rajmohan Gandhi visited Bil'in in April 2010 to show support for Palestinian residents; Martin Luther King III visited Bil'in in April 2010 to lead a workshop on non-violence.

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- International Activists
- Israeli Activists
- Palestinian Bil'in Villagers
- Popular Struggle Coordination Committee

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- Palestinian Ni'lin Villagers

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

- The Elders Organization

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

- Martin Luther King the Third
- Rajmohan Gandhi

*Segment Length: Campaign lasted 6 years; segment length 1 year*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### **Opponents:**

Israeli Government, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)

### **Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

The Israeli military has declared that Bil'in will be a closed area

every Friday for 6 months in order to halt the weekly marches. This closure helps to keep foreign media from entering the area and international activists from joining the protests.

### **Campaigner violence:**

Some Palestinian youth threw rocks at Israeli soldiers, a practice that led the IDF to label the weekly protests as violent.

### **Repressive Violence:**

Israeli troops fire stun grenades, rubber bullets, and tear gas canisters to disperse the protesters. The IDF has also made pre-dawn house raids to arrest protest organizers including Abdulla Abu Rahma and Mohammed Khatib. Over the past 5 years, hundreds of protesters have been arrested and tried for destroying property and inciting violence.

## Success Outcome

### **Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

### **Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

### **Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

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In an effort to prevent Palestinian suicide bombers from entering its borders, the State of Israel began constructing a 425-mile separation barrier along its border with the West Bank in June 2002. The separation barrier, known to Israelis as the "Security Barrier" and to Palestinians as the "Apartheid Separation Wall", extends beyond Israel's internationally recognized borders and weaves through Palestinian territory, often cutting through Palestinian farmland and dividing villages. In the hopes of protecting its illegal settlements and promoting further settlement construction in the West Bank, the Israeli government has continued to confiscate Palestinian-owned land and has allowed for the construction of the separation barrier to extend deep within Palestinian territory. The wall itself is a massive and looming gray structure that is further protected by additional gates, fences, and coils of barbed wire. However, activists with spray cans sometimes make their way through or around the barriers to paint images of peace and freedom and to write messages of resistance on the wall.

In response to numerous Palestinian and NGO complaints about the separation barrier, the International Court of Justice in The Hague investigated the case and ruled in 2004 that the construction of the barrier in the West Bank territory violated international law. In addition, foreign governments and activists expressed the sentiment that building a fence to keep out one's neighbors would not induce constructive peace-talks. However, the Israeli government rejected both the Court's ruling and the international community's unease, asserting that the construction of the wall was necessary to protect Israeli citizens.

As Israel continued building its wall uninhibited, Palestinian residents in the southern border village of Bil'in began marching to and demonstrating at the barrier that cut across their farmlands in February 2005. In this particular village, the wall prevented Palestinian residents from accessing 60% of their fields and separated the village from the growing Israeli settlement of Modiin

Illit, part of which was built on the village's land. The Palestinian residents began demonstrating weekly, marching every Friday afternoon towards the separation barrier. They waved Palestinian flags and shouted at the stationed Israeli troops, demanding that the Israelis leave their land. Regularly, the Israeli soldiers dispersed the protesters by firing rubber bullets and tear gas canisters. However, the weekly demonstrations continued as increasing numbers of Bil'in residents began to participate in the marches. It soon became a ritual to partake in the Friday afternoon protests as many Palestinians sought to resist Israeli settlement encroachment and wall construction. For some, receiving some form of injury from the Israeli soldiers served as a source of pride.

As news of the protests spread, pro-peace Israeli activists and international activists began traveling to Bil'in to participate in the Friday protests and stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people. As popular resistance grew, local protest organizers including Abdulla Abu Rahma and Mohammed Khatib helped form the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee. This Committee was designed to organize and connect Palestinian residents living in different villages as Committee leaders hoped to create a grassroots protest movement that would end the Israeli settlement construction, military occupation, and separation barrier construction. The Committee also partnered with activists of the Stop the Wall Campaign.

The protests in Bil'in prompted residents of the nearby village of Ni'lin to start holding similar rallies in 2007. Just as in Bil'in, protesters in Ni'lin marched up to the separation barrier singing Palestinian liberation songs and waving Palestinian flags, but were driven back by Israeli soldiers who fired stun grenades, water jets, and putrid oil-based liquids that made the entire area smell terribly. In both Bil'in and Ni'lin, hundreds of protesters have been injured over the years, and several have been killed. Israel, however, granted its soldiers impunity in these cases.

The Israeli troops have also arrested hundreds of protesters since the demonstrations began in 2005, arguing that the demonstrations were in fact violent and illegal. Peter Lerner, the spokesman of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), pointed out that many young Palestinian boys threw rocks at the Israeli soldiers and injured several of them. In addition, he accused the protesters of inciting violence and damaging property as protesters repeatedly attempted to break down security fences.

Bil'in protest organizer Wajih Bernat, however, refuted these claims by saying that the Palestinians had the right to resist Israeli domination and that the organizers did not support the stone throwing. He also drew attention to the fact that the stone throwers were often children who were reacting to Israeli violence. Nevertheless, the IDF labeled the demonstrations as riots and conducted several nighttime raids, arresting several protest leaders and protest participants.

Despite these arrests, the villagers of Bil'in continued their protests and pursued a legal battle against the Israeli government in 2007. Israel's High Court ruled in favor of the Palestinians, asserting that it could not find adequate security reasons for the separation barrier to extend so significantly into Bil'in territory. The Court ordered the Israeli government to halt settlement construction in the area and reroute the barrier back towards Israel, effectively restoring half the lost land back to the village. However, although the Israeli government stated that it would observe the Court's decision, the wall has not been removed. Bil'in residents are still working to push the Israeli government into carrying out the Court's orders.

As the weekly protests continued, the village Bil'in began receiving increasing media attention. The protesters' commitment to non-violent struggle attracted members of The Elders Organization, which included former US President Jimmy Carter, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ela Bhatt, Gro Brundtland, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso. These global leaders visited the protesters in Bil'in on 27 August 2009 and extolled them for their non-violent organizing and lauded Bil'in as a model for Palestinian peaceful resistance to Israeli occupation. When protest leader Abdulla Abu Rahma was arrested in December 2009 and committee coordinator Mohammed Khatib later in January 2010, the Elders spoke out in their defense.

In addition, during UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's visit to the Palestinian Territories in March 2010, representatives of the West Bank popular committees handed the Secretary General a letter asking for his support to halt the construction of the separation barrier. Other nonviolence leaders have also recently made their way to Bil'in, as Rajmohan Ghandi and Martin Luther King III visited Bil'in in April 2010 to show their support for the Palestinian residents and to conduct workshops on nonviolence.

In response to such international attention, the IDF increased its arrests of protesters and declared Bil'in a closed area to non-Bil'in residents every Friday until spring 2012. Despite these efforts, the movement continues to grow and is gaining increasing local and global support.

## Research Notes

### Sources:

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Greenberg, Hanan. "IDF takes down Bilin fence." YNet News. 22 June 2011.

Honcocks, Paula. "West Bank Wall Still Triggers Weekly Protests in Village." CNN. 12 February 2010

Kershner, Isabel. "Israeli Court Orders Barrier Rerouted." New York Times. 5 September 2007.

National Public Radio. "Palestinians Practice Non-Violent Resistance in Bil'in." 29 February 2009.

### Additional Notes:

See film "Budrus" (2010) and visit the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee's home website at <http://www.popularstruggle.org/> for more information on other struggles to stop the separation barrier.

### Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Aden Tedla, 10/08/2011

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