



European Union press release
PR/21/2011- Jerusalem
- 8th September 2011

European Union voices concern over situation in Al-Walaja village, Bethlehem

Al Walaja - A group of diplomats from the European Union and EU Member States visited today the village of Al Walaja, close to Bethlehem, to voice their concern over the humanitarian impact and political implications of the planned route of the separation barrier in the village.

Representatives of the Local Council briefed the delegation on the latest developments with regards to the effects of the construction of the barrier, the expansion of settlements and escalating violence by settlers. Walking around the village the diplomats met residents who face enormous hardships in their everyday life and risk to be completely separated from their work and agricultural land when the barrier is completed.

The EU missions in Jerusalem and Ramallah issued last week a statement expressing concern that the barrier – when completed – will completely encircle al-Walaja and reiterated that the barrier is illegal under international law wherever built on occupied land.

The EU has been providing humanitarian support to Al Walaja through UNRWA's health and education services and also works on empowering the local community and fostering local participation via a Community Development Project with Oxfam UK; which was present at today's visit.

Through the EU-Oxfam project, residents have formed a community committee which advocates for local needs and acts as an intermediary between people and the different government bodies that are responsible for serving them. The project is targeting a total of six communities in the West Bank which suffer from lack of services, such as access to water and sanitation, roads, schools, and hospitals and experience particularly high unemployment and poverty levels. Many, like al Walaja, also face house demolitions or evictions and refusal from the Israeli authorities to build in their own communities.

Background:

The village of Walaja, 10km south of Jerusalem in the West Bank, is one of many communities in the West Bank affected by the route of the Israeli Barrier. With construction around the village having begun, residents face the threat of destroyed livelihoods, increased poverty and dependency on humanitarian aid. Some residents face the prospect of their homes soon being totally encircled.

To date, just over 60 per cent of the planned 709km West Bank Barrier has been constructed by Israel. The presence of the Barrier has had a devastating economic, social and psychological effect on communities in the West Bank, and is one of the main triggers of further displacement for already vulnerable refugees. In 2005, the International Court of Justice concluded in an advisory opinion that the route of the Barrier was illegal under international law as it deviates from the green line.

Local EU Statement on Al Walaja:

http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/westbank/documents/news/20110902-eu_statement_onwalaja_en.pdf

Contacts:

Office of the EU Representative:

Antonia Zafeiri, 02 5415859, 054 802 4915 antonia.zafeiri@eeas.europa.eu
Shadi Othman, 0599673958, shadi.othman@eeas.europa.eu

Oxfam Novib Media & Communications Officer:

Willow Heske, 0597133646, willow.heske@oxfamnovib-jerusalem.nl