



Mr. Nigel Roberts
Country Director
World Bank Mission
West Bank and Gaza

26 April 2003

Dear Nigel,

Thank you for sharing with me a copy of the study entitled "The Impact of Israel's Separation Barrier on Affected West Bank Communities," commissioned by the international donor community through the Local Aid Coordination Committee (LACC). I commend the World Bank on its excellent work managing the study and I would like to thank all contributors to this study for their humanitarian concern.

The detail with which the study deals with the negative impact of the Wall on the life of Palestinian communities is noteworthy. This is certainly a serious attempt at a thorough analysis of the economic and social impact of the Wall as well as of its impact on water management. However, the report could benefit from an assessment of the impact of the Wall on the environment and on Palestinian communal life that developed in harmony with the land over centuries. The destruction that the Wall wreaks in these two respects is immeasurable.

As expected, the approach of the study is by-and-large economic and avoids political issues, notwithstanding the fact that the callousness with which the Israeli authorities are implementing their plans in building the Wall comes across in the report fairly clearly. I believe that avoiding the political issue should not go on forever, not only because this ultimately exacts an economic price that burdens the donor community, but also because it is not defensible on moral grounds. Allow me please to explain what I mean.

The recommendations presented in conclusion of the study are suggestive of a way for dealing with an impending doom, a natural disaster or an act of God, rather than with a wanton, illegal act of man that can and should be stopped. Rather than foot the bill for measures that mitigate the impact of Israel's expansionist and annexationist designs month after month and year after year, the international community may wish to finally resolve to invest its influence and financial resources to bring an end to the causes of deterioration in Palestinian life. For one, forced migration, whether induced by the Wall or by other acts that run contrary to international law, should not be allowed to take place under any guise.

The international community has been trying its best to help Palestinians live with the obstacles--of all kinds--that Israel has been putting to hamper development. Whether video-conferencing facilities or paved detours for villagers, these are not the long-term answers to the problems created by Israel's occupation measures. Short-term answers are costly and represent bad investment when the problem that we are dealing has long been judged ripe for a permanent settlement. 36 years of occupation and 55 years of refugee status are long-term conditions by all accounts, and it is time to align our steps and measures with the path prescribed by UNSC resolutions and International Humanitarian Law. Merely monitoring the Wall as it wreaks havoc to Palestinian communal life is a sign of helplessness. Nevertheless, doing something about its impact is a commendable act of humanity and in this respect the study should certainly be very helpful in preparing to deal with the outcome of callous Israeli policies should they continue unchecked.

Please accept my best personal regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Kassis', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Nabeel Kassis
Minister