

As Sawiya Village Profile

AS SAWIYA Village Profile

Name of Village: AS SAWIYA

Name of person doing the survey: Barbara

Date of Survey: October 2004

Who gave the information: Several villagers in As Sawiya who do not wish to be named. Previous IWPS reports were also used.

1. Location of village

The village lies south of Za'atara Checkpoint, on either side of the road from Jerusalem to Nablus (Highway 60) that was constructed two years ago. The houses are mainly on the west side while the land is on the east side.

On the hilltop directly above the Palestinian agricultural land, lies the settlement of Eli that straddles several hills.

Scanning around, you see settlements covering the tops of most of the hilltops – answering Sharon's call in 1998 to militant settlers from the extreme right-wing Tsomet Party: "Everybody has to move, run and grab as many hilltops as they can to enlarge the settlements because everything we take now will stay ours... Everything we don't grab will go to them."

2. Current population, previous population. How many villagers are living outside Palestine?

As Sawiya is a village of 2,100 people

3. Origins of the name. Any ancient sites or legends associated with the village?

Named after its central location within Palestine.

4. Main forms of employment, currently and before intifada.

The village is entirely dependent on the land – previously about 250 of the village residents worked in Israel but now only about 3 people do.

5. Any traditional industries apart from farming?

Stone cutting.

6. Agriculture. What crops do they grow? Any animals? How has this changed over the years?

Farmers currently grow wheat, olives, grapes, figs, and beans and wish to

start growing orange trees on the underutilized land.

The villagers also use the land for grazing their animals. Some residents make yoghurt from their cows and sell it. A Ta'ayush activist used to buy many bottles of olive oil from the village every month and sell them but now this has become much more difficult.

7. Form of government, e.g. village council, municipality.

Appointed or elected. If elected, when were the last elections? If appointed, does each family have a representative?

Village Council was elected in 1994.

8. Political, religious and civic organizations e.g. mosques, women's organizations.

There are no political organisations. One mosque, a sports club.

9. Names of the families living in the village in order of size.

10. Services: Any schools or clinics? How many shops? Nearest hospital, nearest university.

There are few services in Sawiya. There is one clinic and the village relies on Ramallah and Nablus for medical facilities.

There are 10 shops.

The 3 schools are located in between Sawiya and the neighbouring village of Luban, along Highway 60.

The girl's school teaches 200 girls between 6 and 18 from Sawiya. There are 13 teachers, only five of whom live in the village, which causes many problems during curfews and road closures. Local volunteers are helping out, but the girls are still sometimes taught in groups of 35. Despite the high pressure on students and staff, four out of the ten girls that took their final examination ("tawjihi") this year had marks above 90%. One of them was the 6th best student of the whole West Bank and Gaza.

The boys' school teaches 400 pupils from Sawiya and Lubban between the ages of 6 to 18 and offers final examinations in science and literature.

Because the Israeli military does not allow the resident Palestinians to cross the Highway 60 junction between the two villages, the villages made a dirt road from Lubban directly to the school that pupils use instead. It is this road that the settlers use to enter the school during their raids. Also on this road Israeli soldiers have several times trapped students on their way to and from school by not allowing them to go either to the school or back to Lubban. Since the beginning of the Intifada more than 100 pupils have been arrested, and many of them were injured by gun fire while coming or going to school.

11. Utilities: Does the village have electricity, running water? When did they receive these? Other water sources. Any restrictions on their use?

During the period of the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate right up until the 1990s, the village's natural spring was used as the only water source, which settlers are trying to annex. Six years ago, the village was forced to buy the privatized Israeli Mekorot water from the Ariel settlement

for domestic use, even though they have their own water sources they could be using. The water bill for the village for the past year is 150,000 shekels, a sum they find very difficult to pay with the high unemployment. Some homes have their own wells, and use some of this water for their domestic use. Now that the villagers need to utilize the land of the village more to grow enough food for their own needs, they wish to start using the natural water source again. With the help of IWPS, the Hydrology Group is now working with the villagers to bring water from the spring directly to the village.

12. Transportation: what transportation services exist, transportation and road closure problems.

Good transportation services. Road closed south of the village because of house occupied by the Israeli Military.

13. Housing: Village plan, problems with building permits, and history of house demolitions.

4 years ago some houses were demolished. The village has not been able to expand because building permits are not given by the Israelis.

14. Land: total original area, previous confiscations with areas and dates and purpose, current confiscations and how they heard about confiscations.

It is not only agricultural land and strategic infrastructure that are affected by the new Closed Military Zone. (see below)

15. Settlements: when built, population? Settler roads? Any problems with settlers?

The first settlement was built in 1982 when many trees were destroyed for its construction and when water pipes were damaged. The main threat to the village and its plans are the settlers from Eli. Following Sharon's call to grab as much land as possible, the settlers expanded Eli from its one original hilltop directly facing the village to all hilltops surrounding its fields, in the direction of the village well.

Settler violence against the farmers is ongoing – a woman we interviewed described how, during last year's olive harvest, she was attacked by two male settlers who kicked her viciously in the chest, pushing her over. They then made off with her donkey and olives. The settlers stole the olives and the family only found the donkey two days later.

On another occasion farmers and the IWPS and Israeli activists accompanying them, were attacked by Eli settlers with sticks, guns and a dog, shouting: "Nazis! Nazis!"

Settlers have systematically destroyed trees by drilling holes in them and inserting poison. A natural small pool near the water source has been "annexed" by the settlers who are using it as a recreational swimming pool. Recently they fired shots into the air to force Palestinians to leave the area. They have blocked up the entrance to the water source so that Palestinians cannot draw out water.

The IOF have good relations with the local settlers. The settlers often and openly visit soldiers in buildings they have occupied near the village or while

they are on duty on the highway. Often the army has stood by as settlers harassed Palestinians, in one case even shooting one in the foot right in front of a soldier.

16. Past human rights violations: killings, serious injuries, house demolitions, admin detention by army and/or settlers.

Since the beginning of the Intifada, the schools have been the specific target of settler violence inside Sawiya village. Eli settlers have organised more than ten nightly raids on the schools, causing major damage and destruction to especially the girls' school. During the summer holidays of 2002, more than 45 settlers entered the school grounds and set fire to classrooms, books, computers, files and furniture. The settlers entered the school through a gate less than 100m away from a house occupied by Israeli soldiers. The soldiers did nothing.

In a collective voluntary effort, the village collected money to replace lost property and redecorated the school, only to find the settlers coming back on July 30th 2003 to steal the new computers and do more damage to the buildings. Thus, once again the school will start the year without proper equipment. Today a letter from the Palestinian Ministry of Education in Nablus arrived that asks the school to hire guards to protect the building. But the financial situation of the school is already so dire, that it has had to fire teachers and supporting personnel.

In the boys' school, which also serves Luban, settlers have destroyed the gate, damaged windows, chalk boards and walls, and broke down the pole from which the school hangs the Palestinian flag. The villages are now building a 400m concrete wall around the school that they hope will protect it from further damage.

The repeated destruction and theft indicates that the settlers want the Palestinians to evacuate the schools. Although one can only guess at the reasons, it is likely they are interested in the strategic position of the schools and their proximity to Highway 60. The boys' school lays on an isolated piece of land in between the villages, while the girls' school is separated from the rest of the village by the house occupied by soldiers. If the settlers succeed in driving the Palestinians out of their schools and take them over, they will extend their grip on As Sawiya to the west side of Highway 60 and separate it from Luban.

Given the cordial relationship between soldiers and settlers in the area, it is unlikely that the schools have been included in the Closed Military Zone by accident. This decision and the threat of the soldiers to occupy the boys' school, makes the Israeli army an active participant in the settlers' attempts to close As Sawiya in from all sides.

20. Any other relevant information.

Judging from the history of settler activities in As Sawiya and military developments, a slow but systematic land grab seems to be taken place. The settlers are targeting strategic infrastructure of the village, the practical annexation of which is then "ratified" by decisions of the military.

The most recent developments include an order for a permanent Closed

Military Zone that the IOF presented to the village. Residents will need permits from the army to access 3,000 dunams of their land, including all the fields and olive groves on the east side of the road, a strategic stretch of land on both sides of Highway 60 and the junction between As Sawiya and the neighbouring village Luban.

Immediately after, the settlers started to build a new road from one of the hilltops they occupy above the village's land, down to the main Highway. Although they work without permission from the Israeli government and only at night, the construction work is not hindered by the Israeli army in any way. A similar construction project has been initiated by a colony further down the highway to Jerusalem and the villagers fear that the roads will in effect give the settlers complete control over the land in the Closed Military Zone. The only boys' and the girls' schools of As Sawiya are also included. As part of the buffer zone along the highway, the schools will become inaccessible to anybody without a military permit. Moreover, soldiers have announced to its head master that they will occupy the boys' school as soon as the zone is a fact, accusing the pupils of throwing stones.