

נשים נגד הכיבוש ולמען זכויות אדם

نساء ضد الاحتلال ومن اجل حقوق الانسان

Women against the Occupation and for Human Rights



מחסום Watch

# Annual Report 2023



# About MachsomWatch

Since its founding in 2001, MachsomWatch: **Women against the Occupation and for Human Rights** has been closely observing and documenting the functioning of Israel's military checkpoints, as well as directing attention to many other challenges faced by Palestinians living under military rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). In 2004 we formally established ourselves as an NGO under the name **Women's Fund for Human Rights, Ltd.**

Our membership is composed of approximately 150 dedicated women volunteers. As a grassroots organization that values teamwork over hierarchy, we operate without a central office, working in the field and from our homes to keep our expenses minimal and focus our resources on essential needs.

Our volunteers also invest significant time and energy in protesting against the occupation, thus manifesting our commitment to democracy and peace in the face of adversity. Our presence on the ground shows both Israeli soldiers and Palestinian civilians that there are Israelis who earnestly oppose the long-entrenched occupation. It often puts them in challenging situations, especially in terms of exercising their freedom of speech and right to protest within what purports to be a democratic society.

Following the events of October 7th, restrictions on movement and collective punishments have severely affected Palestinian communities in the West Bank, with many facing curfews and blocked access to essential services. No permits to work in Israel have been issued since then, and the checkpoints leading into Israel have been closed to those Palestinians already holding permits. These measures have obviously affected our work at the checkpoints as well.



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## Challenges in 2023

In late December 2022, the new Israeli government led by Benjamin Netanyahu, supported by Likud and ultranationalist parties, took a firm stance in support of expanding settlements, approving thousands of new housing units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and enacting reforms to limit judicial oversight of the executive's powers. The Government legalized some of the new illegal outposts. This shift significantly heightened tension and violence in the West Bank, where settler-initiated roadblocks, alongside threats against and physical attacks on Palestinians, have led to the displacement of families, the undermining livelihoods, and the restriction of access to essential services.

An OCHA survey from the beginning of 2023 noted that there are 565 roadblocks (an increase of 8% since 2020), including 49 manned roadblocks and 139 partially manned roadblocks. In addition, there are 80 roadblocks in Hebron, of which 29 are manned and 69 agricultural roadblocks/gates in the separation barrier, most of which are not opened except for a few days during the harvest season. Throughout the year, and especially in the summer months, our volunteers saw a significant increase in manned checkpoints at intersections and blockades at the entrances to cities and villages, an expression of the Defense Minister's policy. All of these greatly complicated the Palestinian access to humanitarian aid and made daily life difficult.



Following the events of October 7, an additional 100 roadblocks were set up and stringent restrictions have been enforced upon almost every Palestinian village. The severe limitations on movement include blocking main entrances to towns and villages and the imposition of curfews on certain cities, such as Hebron.

This aggravated policy has radically impacted Palestinian workers, especially in the agriculture and construction sectors, condemning approximately 152,000 of the 160,000 people who hold work permits to unemployment—with its attendant financial distress. What’s more, the obstacles faced by farmers in securing permits to tend to their groves and fields in the Seam Zone, added to the violence perpetrated against them by extremist settlers, and have severely affected autumn olive harvest—a crucial source of income.

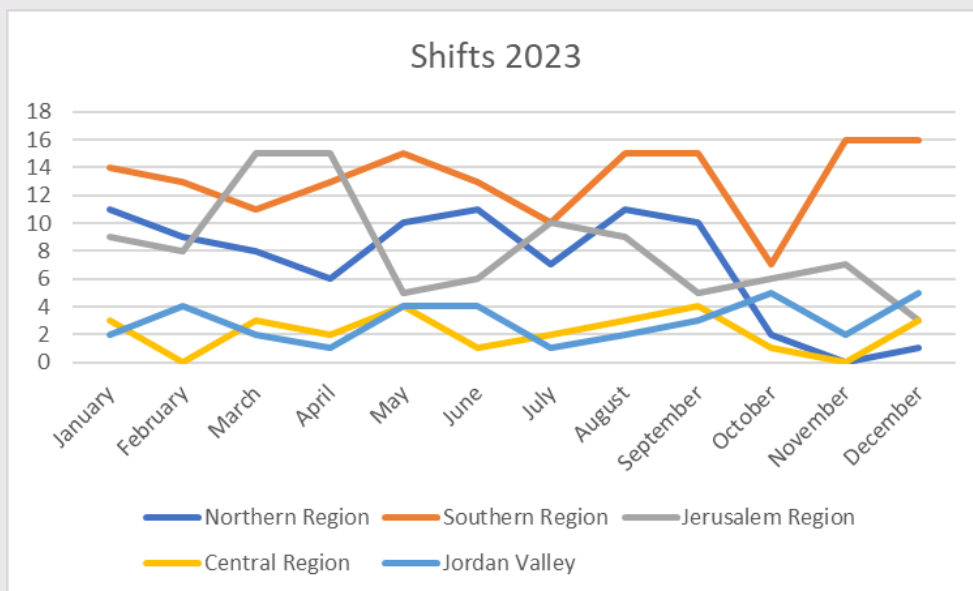
Since October 10 nightly operations by the IDF have resulted in over 5,000 West Bank Palestinians being detained and at least 275 individuals, including 63 children, losing their lives in incidents involving Israeli forces or armed settlers. In fact, 2023 has been the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since the OCHA began recording casualties in the OPT in 2005. Since the beginning of 2023, at least 492 West Bank Palestinians have been killed, more than 12,769 Palestinians have been injured by Israeli forces and settlers.

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/israel-and-palestine>

## Our Focus

### Monitoring Checkpoints

During 2023 we carried out 403 shifts at the checkpoints in five regions.



### Highlights

MachsomWatch volunteers reported that since the early summer months of 2023 many previously closed or unmanned checkpoints have been reinstated, resulting in further constricting Palestinians’ freedom of movement. We also reported a rise in the number of roadblocks and soldiers present throughout the West Bank, especially in Hebron, the South Hebron Hills and in villages and towns in the Central region.

Our volunteers visited families in **Um Safa and Nebi Saleh**. These villages suffered from pogroms carried out by extremist settlers in June and July 2023.

### **The Olive Harvest**

Our friends and contacts in villages in the West Bank have desperately reported that this year radical settlers have waged war against the Palestinian autumn harvest. They prevented the owners of private plots from harvesting their olives, even those growing within villages. Settlers uprooted trees, beat and injured hapless farmers, set fire to crops and homes, stole and destroyed crops. And all this was done openly, while the army turned a blind eye to the rampages.

### **Aid to Palestinian Families**

“Shared fate is shared action.” This was the message from the people of the Bedouin town of **Hura**, in southern Israel, who invited us to come to their “civilian war room.” We visited and helped in the warehouses where boxes of donated goods were packed so that each West Bank Palestinian family asking for aid can receive basic necessities.

## **Our Presence in the Field**

### **Jordan Valley**

We made 35 visits to remote areas of the Jordan Valley in 2023 and have continued to raise awareness of the brutal situation Palestinians face in that region. In addition to providing communities with supplies, our members have regularly accompanied Palestinian shepherds grazing their flocks to protect them from attack by belligerent settlers.

The situation in the Jordan Valley has grown all the more dire as settlers in new illegal outposts continue to grow increasingly brazen. Their threats have now caused a number of shepherd communities to flee the area. To cite but one example, the community of **southern a-Nassariya**, composed of five families and 25 people, fled on October 13 after settlers ordered them to abandon their homes under threat of violence. A number of other communities have been attacked and have similarly left. Since October 7 our volunteers have devoted many days to delivering donated food to various shepherd communities in response to their pleas for aid.

### **South Hebron Hills**

The plight of Palestinians living in the South Hebron Hills is equally chilling. Here too, the 30 communities of farmers and herders, comprising some 4,000 people, are subject to a ruthless policy of repeated destruction of their homes, cisterns, groves, and crops by a combination of actions by the Israeli military and settler outlaws. Our members have been consistently visiting and reporting on the situation in this area, and since October 7 we have enhanced our documentation of the ongoing destruction, as well as brought in food and other supplies to sustain families requesting material support.

## Central Region

Throughout 2023 (even prior to October 7), our volunteers noted an alarming deterioration in the situation of the Palestinian population in villages in the Central West Bank. With inferred encouragement of government ministers, violent settlers increased their attacks on a growing number of villages; the settlers prevented Palestinian farmers from cultivating their land and damaged crops. The army set up roadblocks on main roads. This forced residents to circumvent direct access and they have to drive long hours on dirt roads to get from village to village. The number of violent military raids on villages, both day and night, has paralyzed trade, and claimed an unprecedented number of victims.

Since the beginning of the war, the situation has worsened. We are unable to enter the most isolated villages, there is no passage for farmers at the agricultural gates, and we are only able to patrol the roads and document the checkpoints and blockades that have multiplied.

## Northern Region

Throughout 2023, until October 7, we observed fence barriers and internal barriers in the northern West Bank. The situation was bad even before the war. The **Aanin** and **Tayba-Romana** agricultural checkpoints, which were open twice a week to allow farmers to cultivate their land in the seam zone, were shut at the end of the summer. These gates were meant to be open only twice a year, in the spring (for plowing and pruning), and in the fall (during the harvest season) thus leaving the area for the cultivation of olive trees only. The separation fence was replaced by a formidable concrete wall, which completely hides the villages behind it. The **Harmesh** internal checkpoint, which was open and unmanned for many years, was re-manned due to an attack there in May.

During the war, we did not enter the West Bank and visited the **Aanin** checkpoint only once, during the 4 days it was open during the harvest season. This checkpoint services Palestinian farmers whose private land is locked in the Seam Zone (areas located between the Separation Barrier built inside the West Bank and the 1949 Armistice Line separating Israel from the West Bank). Unfortunately, since the checkpoint closed for most of the harvest period, the economic loss to the farmers was enormous. We did maintain telephone contact with our acquaintances in the West Bank. We heard about their hardships and it was not in our power to help.

## Jerusalem and Environs

Since the outbreak of the war on October 7, most of the checkpoints regulating access to Jerusalem have been closed. Hence the residents of the neighborhoods and villages cut off from Jerusalem by the Separation Barrier cannot enter it for work, studies, medical treatment, or any other need, from the simplest to the most complex. The result is that thousands of Palestinians have been deprived of their livelihoods, and general economic distress continues to deteriorate.

In 2023 the activity of the Jerusalem group focused mainly on the increasingly harsh restrictions on the freedom of movement of Palestinians, for whom Jerusalem serves as a municipal center.

In addition, as the demolition of Palestinian homes in their neighborhoods and villages reached a peak, we visited the sites targeted for destruction, met their residents, and did our best to report widely about this travesty of justice.

We continued to draw attention to the clumsy process of moving patients from Palestinian to Israeli ambulances at checkpoints—a procedure that both humiliates and jeopardizes the patients.

We closely followed the construction of apartheid roads solely for the use of settlers, which greatly reduces the mobility of tens of thousands of Palestinians.

We documented the procedures at the **Etzion DCO** (District Coordination and Liaison Office), which continues to be substandard. For example, Shin Bet (Security Services), issue Palestinians appointments for the early morning hours and then keep them waiting until the evening, when they are instructed to return another day. Sometimes a group of professionals—mainly teachers—are summoned to the office and, when they arrive, are required to provide information about students and their families.

Finally, perhaps in a bid to somewhat streamline the bureaucracy of the permits system, an online service was instituted enabling Palestinians to check the status of their permits. Yet what was meant to be an aid has too often become a frustrating challenge, for employing the system requires Internet access and skills not readily available to the entire population.

## Helping Blacklisted Palestinians

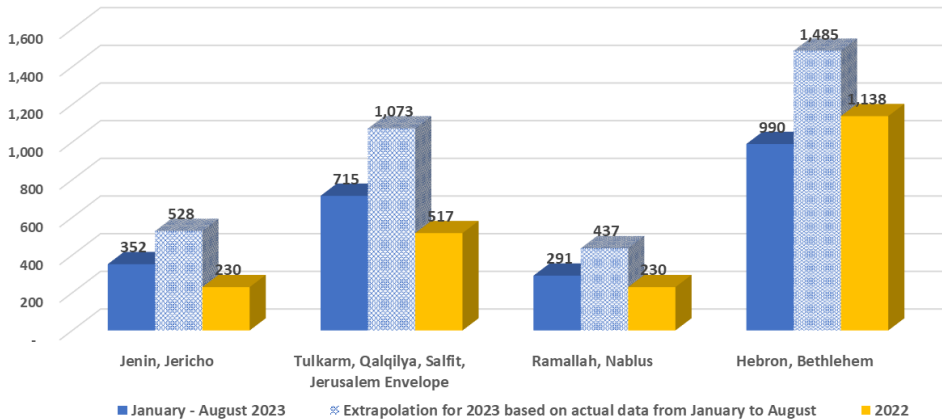
In order to receive a permit to enter Israel, Palestinians in the OPT must undergo a security check. Until they are cleared, they are considered as “blacklisted” on security grounds. The Defense Ministry’s Civil Administration maintains a department to process the removal of Palestinians



from the blacklist (called the Center for Removal of Security Preventions). In 2023 the number of requests by Palestinians, submitted to the Center via a team of MachsomWatch volunteers, doubled compared to the previous year. However, the number of Palestinians who were removed from the blacklist decreased sharply.



A sharp increase in 2023 in the number of Palestinians who, via MachsomWatch, submitted requests to be removed from the security blacklist.



The Center for the Removal of Security Preventions faced overwhelming workloads and significant processing delays. This led to a dramatic increase in the immediate rejection of applications and the resurgence of a process that unfairly targets Palestinians sharing surnames with those presumed to be involved in anti-occupation activities.

The Center's operations were notably chaotic. By failing to adhere to its own processing timelines, it caused applicants to endure a long wait for the answer to their requests. The inefficiency demanded considerable effort on the part of our volunteers handling follow-ups. It also affected Palestinian livelihoods and, by extension, the Palestinian economy as a whole.

Prior to October 7 operations proceeded as usual, with our work invested in clarifying and submitting a total of 435 requests (292 of them prepared for submission in September alone). Following the events of October 7, the Center for Removal of Security Preventions announced that it would not process any new submissions, effectively halting its operations.

## Public Outreach

On January 30, 2023, we held talks with Israeli youth about the occupation and human rights at the **Sommer School** in Ramat Gan, an anthroposophic school operating according to the Waldorf method. Our discussion highlighted issues such as restrictions on movement, the challenges posed by checkpoints, and the power of the permit system. The dialogue also covered the risks faced by young soldiers involved in operations affecting civilians.

On November 1, 2023, we held a meeting with the **Jerusalem Preparatory School in Kiryat Anavim** at which we addressed the role of MachsomWatch in monitoring checkpoints to defend freedom of movement and other human rights. The conversation shed light on the difficulties of conveying the occupation's harsh impact on Palestinian society to Israeli youth, who are more



exposed to the repercussions of the bi-national conflict on Israeli life than they are versed in its causes.

In 2023 there were seven meetings with groups from Germany and the U.S. including members of the **Women's World Day of Prayer** in May and a meeting in Spanish with a group that studied in the course "Women, Violence, and War" at the **Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action in Madrid**. One local meeting took place with Sicha BaSalon (Living room Conversations).

## Weekly Protests

At a March 3, 2023, demonstration against Jewish terrorism, some 500 Israelis from several human rights organizations, including MachsomWatch, marched from the **Za'atra junction** towards the town of **Huwara**, after the army had blocked our journey by bus. Along the way we waved signs and gestures of peace and sympathy at Palestinian cars and received curses from settlers. We also experienced violence on the part of the army.

MachsomWatch members joined the weekly demonstrations across the country against the government's attempts at a judicial overhaul, as part of the Bloc Against the Occupation. We also carried signs and sold T-shirts with the slogan: *"We were silent about the occupation and got a dictatorship [in return]."*



On July 7, 2023, in the village of **Burka**, our members participated in a peaceful march by Palestinians and Israelis against restoring the settlement of **Homesh**, which had been built on Burka's land and was dismantled by the government in 2005. The Israeli army intervened, blocking access a few kilometers from Burka and deploying tear gas against the demonstrators, which led to an olive grove catching fire. Still, activists from across Israel, representing a strong commitment to end the occupation, converged on the site in eight buses, demonstrating solidarity and resilience.

## Media Outreach, Website, and Social Media

### Media mentions

MachsomWatch and its activities were mentioned in six academic articles, 11 articles on news sites, and two documentaries. The film "[Gatekeepers: Memories](#)," directed by Eliezer Yaari, was shown at [the Jerusalem Film Festival](#) in July and was later aired on the cable channel Hot 8.



*Documenting the occupation and West Bank checkpoints: A new film, screened at Jerusalem Film Festival, follows the courageous women of MachsomWatch ■ 'The women took on a moral mission. People spat at them from all directions'*

In the documentary, which explores MachsomWatch in its first decade between 2002 and 2012, Yaari interviews nine of our activists and uses archival footage filmed by our member Neta Efroni. The film weaves together moments from life in the West Bank. At times we were extras,

sometimes active participants.

### News mentions

1. Tamar Fleischmann, "[Palestine: A Car Accident Victim's Long Way to the Hospital](#)," Palestine Chronicle, January 17, 2023
2. Lily Galili, "[Why Israel's New and Leaderless Protest Movement is Different](#)," Middle East Eye, February 4, 2023.
3. February 9, 2023. World Council of Churches. <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/at-checkpoints-for-palestinians-we-must-do-something-about-this-inhumane-system-of-control>
4. Jerusalem - The Forbidden City: MachsomWatch women continuing to talk about the Occupation - Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1srtrV4Jis>
5. Sam Stein, "[We are not the Israelites in the Current reality](#)," Plus 61JMedia, April 21, 2023
6. Tamar Fleischmann, "['Let Them Wait': A Palestinian Man on a Stretcher](#)," Palestine Chronicle, June 1, 2023.
7. ["עידו דוד כהן, 'שומרות הסף: זיכרונות' כך החמיצה התקשורת את הסקופים של נשות מחסום ווטש"](#) 17.7.2023 הארץ
8. Ido David Cohen, "[Kindness at the Gate: The Israeli Women who Fight the Occupation](#)," Haaretz, July 20 2023.

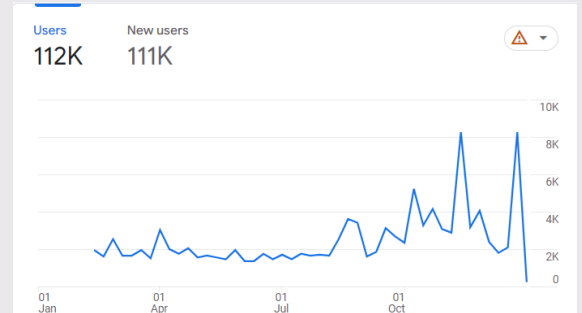
9. [הארץ, "איזנקוביץ, גילי. "שומרות הסף: אי אפשר לצפות בסרט על נשות מחסום ווטש ולא לחוש כאב](#)  
26.9.2023
10. [בלכליסט, "רותה קופפר, "השיפור במחסומים זה רק קוסמטיקה](#)  
27.9.2023
11. [מעריב, "דורון הרוש, "שומרות הסף: סרט שמדביק לכורסה ומכאיב](#)  
29.9.2023

## Website and Social Media Outreach

### Website statistics

The MachsomWatch website hosted 112,000 visitors in 2023. Traffic rose drastically after Oct 7, 2023.

During the year there were 197,000 page views with 648,000 interactions (download a document, watch a video, subscribe to a newsletter, donate, contact us, etc.) —close to two pages and three interactions per user.



### Facebook Ad Statistics

- MachsomWatch ads reached an audience of 408,100 viewers (up by 386.3%)
- 332,769 viewers were through ads
- 99,000 came from organic traffic (the number of people who had an unpaid post from a MachsomWatch page on their screen)
- Messaging conversations went up 330% to 142
- 105 conversations were new contacts (up 320%)
- There were 78,900 content interactions
- There were 3,306 link clicks (up by 137.2%)

### Facebook Posts Statistics

- Our page reached 8,600 followers (up by 635)
- There were 36,999 visits
- There were 371 new page likes (up by 61%)

### Instagram statistics

- 76 posts (up 181%) brought
- 27 new followers, bringing it to 1,596 followers
- 178 profile visits, rose by 109%



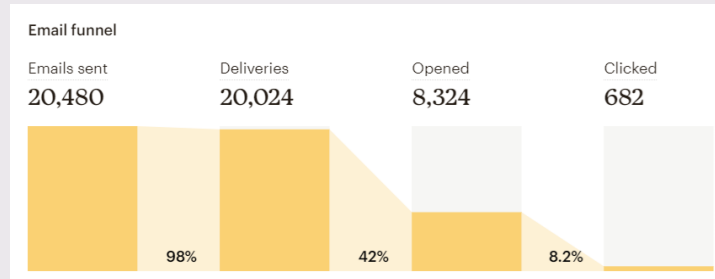
- Reach declined 47% to 319

### Newsletter statistics

In 2023, six Hebrew and four English Newsletters were sent out to our database.

This shows an impressive open rate of 42% with a click-through rate of 8.2% and an unsubscribe rate of merely 0.44%.

The English versions have an open rate of 63% vs. the Hebrew versions of 42% - 49%.



### Sea Days

During the summer, Sea Days volunteers arrange for Palestinian children and their mothers to visit the sea. This year 17 groups visited. The groups totaled approximately 920 children and mothers. Over 500 volunteers contributed funds and/or helped organize the day. The children and women enjoyed Tel Baruch Beach, which welcomes us kindly each year. <https://www.minelbahar.com>



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