The Struggle Over the Wall

Prof Sattar Kassem

In April, 2002, Israel decided to carry out its plans to build a wall labeled as the security wall. It argued that this wall is intended to engulf the population centers in the West Bank for the purpose of preventing Palestinian infiltrators from carrying out explosions in the Israeli population centers. It announced that the project consists of three stages starting with what it described as the most dangerous geographic areas surrounded by heavy Palestinian population centers, and ending with a long wall separating Jordan valley in the east from the rest of the West Bank.

Instead of building the wall on the cease fire line recognized as the de facto borders between Jordan (the West Bank was part of the Hashemite Kingdom in 1967) and Israel, it is being built inside the West bank. Due to that, Israel, as estimated, has confiscated around 167 sq kilometers in the first stage with around 18,000 Palestinians separated from the West Bank and besieged between the wall and Israel. (The area of the West Bank is around 5,880 sq kilometers. Israel has built gates along the wall as outlets for the Palestinians who move back and forth. But the freedom of movement is extremely limited due to Israeli imposed conditions. Only few people can move in and out and at certain limited hours.

I myself lost my land in this project, and due to the detailed tough measures imposed by the Israeli army, I haven't been able to get there. These measures actually convinced so many Palestinians to abandon the land which is their major source of living.

Once the wall is completed in its three stages, around 3,400 sq kilometers will be confiscated, an equivalent of 58% of the total area of the West Bank. The 42% aren't going to be purely Palestinian due to the scattered settlements and the by-pass roads that feed them. In other words, the Palestinians will be left with fragments of land that are separated by Israeli installations.

That is why the Palestinians describe the wall as racial that deems the establishment of a Palestinian state impossible. They argue that if it was for security matters the wall would not bite so much Palestinian land, but due to this brutality in land confiscation Israel only seeks to strip the Palestinians from a major source of income and keep them under extreme economic need. The wall, as they say, exceeds Israel's security needs to hit hard on the Palestinian well-being and their ability to achieve independence.

Besides, the Palestinians question Israel's willingness to pursue the peace process because the wall has ruined the possibility of establishing an independent Palestinian state. If a two state solution is envisaged for the Mid Eastern conflict, the wall has left no space for optimism. The US, Europe, Japan, Russia, the UN and so many states have been talking about a Palestinian state that would live in peace with Israel in good faith and mutual cooperation. There is almost a consensus that this new emerging state will be established on the West Bank with minor territorial modifications or exchanges. The Palestinians contend that this international vision isn't workable anymore.

The Palestinians have been waging a campaign against the wall on both public and official levels. Israeli peace supporters have been demonstrating and protesting together with Palestinians against the wall; the Palestinian Authority have been complaining to so many states and international organizations atop of which is the US. The US together

with some other states have expressed concern and exerted, as reported in the mass media, some pressure on Israel to avoid confiscating “so much Palestinian land.” British Prime Minister said that he understands Israel’s security needs, but the way the wall is being built should be given another consideration. The US, as reported, pressured Israel to make certain modifications on the path of the wall, and to allow for more freedom of movement for the Palestinians.

Israel continues building the wall with very little attention to international pressure and local protests. Thus, it is actually jeopardizing the peace process and leaving the Palestinian Authority with no choices. If negotiations are resumed, the world is going to find that there is nothing left to be the subject of negotiation. And after all, if Israel hasn’t been backed with the US, it won’t be able to withstand all the pressure exerted.