

From Temporary Measures to Permanent Policy: How the Denial of Access to Seam Zone Farmers Is Reshaping Control Over West Bank Lands

Background

In November 2025, the army published an updated version of its entry regulations for the "Seam Zone". The new procedure alters the principle governing eligibility for agricultural entry permits—from a right based primarily on ownership and connection to land to a system based on demonstrated “agricultural need.” **In practice, these changes severely limit land access for olive growers, which account for approximately 95% of farmers, allowing them to access their lands for only few days a year.**

In January 2026, the High Court of Justice (HCJ) rejected HaMoked's petition challenging the war-time access restrictions imposed by the military on farmers in the “Seam Zone” during the war — restrictions that have since become permanent. Despite the significant decrease in hostilities, the court accepted the state position that the restrictions are still crucial security measures.

These restrictions prevent the overwhelming majority of agricultural permit holders in the Seam Zone, around 20,000 people, from reaching their lands for most of the year. The consequences are already visible on the ground: The prolonged absence of farmers from their land during the war has contributed to crop damage, land encroachment by Israeli citizens, and the conversion of agricultural areas into grazing grounds and waste dumping sites.

The story of Adnan

For decades, Adnan relied on agricultural land beyond the separation barrier for his livelihood. After being denied access for nearly two years, he was allowed to enter for just one day in November 2025, only to find his land overgrown and neglected. Reflecting on the experience, he said: **“Seeing your land like this is painful. I wish I had never entered in the first place.”** Today, Adnan remains unable to access his land regularly and has lost not only his primary source of income but also a vital part of his identity. He is now considering selling it, saying that he would rather lose his land than continue to watch it lie barren and neglected.

Legal and Policy Implications

Contrary to the common perception that the separation barrier marks Israel’s border, 85% of its route runs inside the West Bank rather than along the Green Line. Consequently, its construction met with widespread international condemnation,

culminating in the [ICJ advisory opinion](#) which concluded that the construction of the barrier is contrary to international law as it infringes on basic rights of the local Palestinian Population.

Contrary to the ICJ advisory opinion, the Israeli High Court of Justice approved the legality of the wall, while [instructing the State](#) to preserve, as much as possible, the pre-existing fabric of life, including farmers' access to their land, subject to security needs. However, over time, increasingly restrictive measures have steadily eroded these rights. **The recent restrictions represent a significant escalation of this process, during which the HCJ repeatedly failed to intervene.** Despite its earlier statements, the HCJ rejected HaMoked's recent petition without meaningfully weighing the infringement of farmers' rights against security needs.

The recent restrictions directly contradict the individual rights of local communities recognized in the ICJ advisory opinion, including the right to freedom of movement (para. 134), the right to work and the right to an adequate standard of living (para. 130). **More broadly, by entrenching the prolonged absence of Palestinian farmers from extensive agricultural lands, this policy alters the effective control of these areas.** It thereby undermines the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, recognized in paragraphs 122-123 of the advisory opinion.

Conclusion

By preventing thousands of Palestinian farmers from accessing their land, these restrictions are already producing tangible changes on the ground. **Left in place, they will continue to undermine territorial integrity, stability and land access in the "seam zone", facilitating de facto annexation.**

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