

Annual Report 2019

נשים נגד הכיבוש ולמען זכויות אדם
نساء ضد الاحتلال ومن اجل حقوق الانسان
Women against the Occupation and for Human Rights



About Machsom Watch

Since 2001, MachsomWatch, has observed, monitored, documented, and raised awareness about conditions that Palestinians face in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) under Israeli military rule. In 2004, MachsomWatch became an independent legal entity, registering as the not-for-profit company called the Women's Fund for Human Rights, Ltd.

MachsomWatch is composed of 200 Israeli women volunteers. As an all-women grassroots organization, we reject hierarchy and work only through cooperative teamwork. The organization does not have an office, as we work from our homes and in the field. Expenses are kept to a minimum and are only used for material needs.

MachsomWatch activists dedicate extraordinary time, energy, and commitment to the goal of ending the Occupation. We embody a democratic, female civilian presence in military spaces. Our daily presence in front of soldiers and Palestinians demonstrates that there are Israelis who oppose the Occupation. Playing the dissident role in Israeli society challenges our rights to free speech and to protest, even within a society that sees itself as democratic.

Executive Summary

During 2019, human rights and peace organizations in Israel continued to be demonized.

Our volunteers encountered many hostile situations during their shifts and were often confronted by settlers who were backed up by the army and the police.

Our volunteers refuse to be intimidated by these actions and continue to carry out their shifts.

During the 2nd round of elections in April 2019, MachsomWatch was the subject of many “fake news” items. Supporters of Netanyahu charged the wife of Benny Gantz, the rival opponent, of being a member of MachsomWatch (see for example, the article in the Jerusalem Post, “No, My Wife does not Work for MachsomWatch”). Ms. Gantz was never a member of MachsomWatch.

This barrage of fake news confirms yet again that MachsomWatch remains a household name and a serious nemesis to the right wing. Despite the election results, our activities have continued as planned.

In October, Education Minister Rafi Peretz announced that he would crack down on schools and other academic institutions that continue to host MachsomWatch and other human rights organizations.

This attack made us even more firmly resolved to continue our work, which has received positive responses in the media and by institutions that continue to invite us to talk to young people.

Checkpoint Monitoring

Between January 1 and December 31, 2019, we carried out 733 shifts to the checkpoints in the Jerusalem region, the Northern West Bank, the Hebron Region, the Central West Bank, and the Jordan Valley, where we maintained a visible and non-violent presence. In addition, we visited a number of West Bank villages.

In February 2019, a new pedestrian checkpoint was opened at Qalandiya. It includes a few improvements: a ramp for the handicapped and for people with children in strollers. The checkpoint now has a wide hall with checking stations that closely resemble passport control areas in large airports. The barred “cages” people used to pass through have been replaced by three passages, with decorated walls and signs in Arabic only.

This transformation at Qalandiya can be contributed in part to the journalists who wrote about the previous difficult conditions as well as to members of MACHSOMWATCH who have been reporting on Qalandiya checkpoint since 2001. We were also contacted by many journalists about this change at Qalandiya and were quoted in several news items about its automation.

Although the new checkpoint improves the passage of Palestinians, we do not see this as an achievement, as it still is effectively part of the Israeli Occupation, the permit regime, and the control of Palestinians' lives.

Despite the automation of the Qalandiya and also of the Bethlehem checkpoints, problems still arise at them. *Please see our reports on our website to learn more about the problems at all the checkpoints.*

In September, we were responsible for a *Channel 11* report on the unsanitary conditions at the Qalandiya and Bethlehem Checkpoints and at the Etzion DCO. The report included an interview with a member of MachsomWatch.







Maintaining a Regular Presence in the Jordan Valley

In 2019, we undertook 68 shifts to the Jordan Valley, some with the participation of other NGOs.

Our volunteers have been intensely active in the Jordan Valley, documenting and trying to help the Palestinian shepherd communities, whose situation has deteriorated due to demolitions and harassment by settlers and the army. *Please see our website for reports about the Jordan Valley.*

Among several reports on demolitions of homes and water tanks, we reported in July on the demolition of the encampment of the Ka'abana family in Ein Hadidya, whose home had already been demolished twice in the previous two months. As bulldozers arrived to demolish the encampment, the desperate family as it drive away on a cart pulled by a tractor was hit by an Israeli truck, killing the family's new born baby and critically injuring the mother. The father and two other children were also injured. We shared this tragedy on Facebook, which logged some 30,000 views.

One of our major goals during this period has been to continue supporting and protecting the Palestinian shepherd communities who are severely harassed by settlers as they take their herds to graze.

MachsomWatch volunteers and other groups accompanied the shepherds as often as possible. When we were there, the settlers usually pulled back, the sheep could graze, and the harassment diminished. Sometimes, however, the shepherds and the volunteers were confronted by violent settlers and by the army, ordering them to leave the area.

Our constant presence in the Jordan Valley attracted the attention of “Israel Social TV.” In May, Israel Social TV produced a news story on the Palestinian shepherds in the Jordan Valley, including an interview with Daphne Banai, a MachsomWatch member who is a leading activist in the Jordan Valley. Amira Hass also mentioned our activity in the Jordan Valley in her article in *Haaretz* on “Uri’s Farm,” one of the illegal outposts there.



The Maqam Project — Surveying Traditional Palestinian Heritage Sites

Together with Palestinian landowners and local councils, MachsomWatch activists surveyed traditional Palestinian cultural, religious, and heritage sites (singular makam, plural makamat). These shrines were dedicated to biblical and qur'anic, real or mythical, male and female figures and played an important role in Palestinian religious and cultural life. The team has produced an extensive survey of 40 sites, which soon will be shared on our website.

MachsomWatch volunteers filmed and produced the film *Makam*, in cooperation with Israel Social TV, which was shared on Israel Social TV in February 2019.



Military Court Watch

MachsomWatch members attended 59 military court hearings, during which multiple cases were heard. *Please see our website for the reports from the military courts.*

In 2019, we translated our report Masters' Rule into *German*, joining our English and Hebrew editions published in 2018. One of our volunteers traveled to Germany where she presented this work at various meetings and interviews.

In an *article* published in January 2019 in *Haaretz*, Amira Hass reported that the military courts had fined Palestinians \$16 million in three years, and noted that our CourtWatch reports revealed that the fines given were done whimsically and not in a systematic way nor in any uniform fashion.

Helping Blacklisted Palestinians

MachsomWatch continued to work with blacklisted Palestinian workers and merchants to help them appeal against their blacklisting status due to security considerations.

This team spends 18 hours each week answering phone calls. This team answered several thousands of phone requests for assistance and handled 7000 faxes.

This year, 1889 requests were submitted. 897 people (or 54%) were removed from the blacklists, out of a total 1648 requests that received an answer. MachsomWatch helped in some of these requests, and some were prepared by the DCO in Hebron.

During 2019, 174 petitioners submitted court appeals against not being removed from the security blacklists. 113 cases were successful. Twenty petitioners were not yet removed from the blacklist but were told that if they submit a new request in several months their requests will be considered positively. These case were handled by Adv. Tamir Blank.

MachsomWatch also gets requests from people blacklisted by the Israel Police, mainly because they were caught working illegally in Israel. During 2019, 85 people with open files sent their documents to us. MachsomWatch referred 21 people to Adv. Tamir Blank, with 8 people getting their files closed.

In 2019, we started submitting “technical appeals” to the police with the help of Adv. Tamir Blank. We found plenty of mistakes in the police records and in the calculations of the duration of the blacklisting. People have been blacklisted by mistake for many years and many of them till 2099. We have been able to cancel these blacklisting errors for quite a few people and they have already working permits.



Administrative Deterrence

In 2019, we continued to handle a court case from 2018, when we appealed to the court for groups of people whose permits had been cancelled.

They had been blacklisted and banned from getting work or merchant permits because they had the same family names as people who had participated in the wave of violence in the past years.

In 2019, we received verdicts for 190 Palestinians who had appealed the refusal to remove them from the blacklists. These appeals were handled with help from MachsomWatch and Adv. Tamir Blank. 109 or 57% were successfully removed from the blacklist after this appeal process.

Changes of Procedures for Obtaining Work Permits

For several years, MachsomWatch volunteers have petitioned for changes to be made in the process for granting work permits in Israel to Palestinian workers. The system is ripe with corruption. Palestinian workers are held at the mercy of their employers and must pay enormous monthly sums to middlemen in order to maintain their permits.

A 2015 proposal for reform, prepared by MachsomWatch and presented to the Coordinator of Government Action in the Territories, is finally getting some attention. Amira Hass wrote *a major article about this problem* for *Haaretz* where MachsomWatch is mentioned. While we cannot take credit for any pending reform, we believe that our petition for change was a catalyst for bringing this issue to the forefront.

Reality Tours & Lectures

MachsomWatch gave 17 tours, attended by 311 people. We published 3 ads in *Haaretz* newspaper promoting our tours. We also advertised our tours on our Facebook page, website, and in our newsletters.

Our tours bring Israeli and foreign visitors to visit checkpoints and villages in the Central West Bank. Misinformation about the military rule in the OPT is rife, and few know about the Separation Barrier, the problems it has engendered with the creation of the Seam Zone, and the agricultural checkpoints making it difficult for farmers to reach their land. Having Israelis meet Palestinians within their villages is effective in sharing the reality that we witness daily.

In July 2019, Social TV published a *report about the village of Qaddum*, which was filmed during one of our tours.

We also held several lectures for various groups, in several languages, mainly from abroad.

Talks with Israeli Youth about the Occupation and Human Rights

Despite attempts to keep organizations like MachsomWatch out of the educational system, our activity of speaking with young Israelis enrolled in the pre-military academies and in a few kibbutz and private high schools successfully continued. In fact, we even increased our outreach.

In 2019, we met over 1,000 people in pre-military academies and schools, 66% more than the previous year. We travelled hundreds of kilometers to meet them in their academies in the Galilee and Negev, as well as on tours in the Seam Zone and the West Bank.





Beach Days

The Beach Days project is organized and supported by members of MachsomWatch and other Israeli activists. The project involves bringing Palestinian women and their children to a day of fun at the beach.

Members of MachsomWatch and many others volunteer to make sandwiches and to join the women and children at the beach.

In 2019, 23 Sea Days took place, attended by more than 1,200 Palestinians and supported by 400 volunteers. This year, *Israel Social TV* reported on the project.



Media Outreach

We were mentioned in over 95 media items in the Israeli and foreign press. We also appeared in at least 7 academic articles that were published in 2019.

Our website continues to be vigorously maintained and updated. In the last few months of 2019, we worked to receive Google grants, so that we can promote our organization as well as our tours and other events.

For all of 2019, we had 37,981 users on our website, of which 37,413 had never visited our site before. Most of the users were in the 25-34 age group and 40% used Hebrew browsers.

At the end of 2019, we had 7267 followers on Facebook, 492 more than in 2018. Our posts about the Jordan Valley had significant distribution. A post on August 5th with a photograph of a baby who had been killed by an Israeli truck in the Jordan Valley was viewed by 33,000 people, with 7890 people engaging with the post. *A post from September 1st about how Israeli soldiers have to escort Palestinian children on their way to school near Havat Ma'on to protect them from settlers reached over 9,700 people. A video that we posted about demolitions in the Jordan Valley reached 11,400 viewers. On December 29th, a post about how the army drills affected 100 people in the Jordan Valley, including old and young, in the middle of the winter, reached 16,800 readers.*

On Twitter, we had 1828 followers and acquired 210 new followers during 2019. We also had 151,414 impressions (number of times our tweets, retweets, and replies appeared on Twitter) and 1,976 profile visits by people who wanted to see who we are.

MachsomWatch volunteers filmed and produced ten videos documenting the situation in various checkpoints, agricultural gates, and villages. The videos are presented in Hebrew and English and are featured on our website, in our newsletter, and *YouTube* channel. Videos included a situation of actual harassment in the Jordan Valley; effects of demolitions on a Jordan Valley family; the Qalandiya Checkpoint before and after its renovation; Tarkumia Checkpoint; Mas'ha Agricultural Gate and an interview with the head of the local council; and the impact of settler actions in the Hebron region.

We also published *4 newsletters* in Hebrew and English during 2019.

Our film, the Fading Valley, which was produced in 2013, is still making the rounds. In October 2019, it was featured at the *Boston Palestine Film Festival* and in November it appeared in Bonn, Germany at a Palestinian film festival and also at the *International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film*.

MachsomWatch member Leah Shakdiel was *invited to speak* at the Israeli-Palestinian Memorial service. It was attended by 9000 people and live streamed around the world.



Our Supporters in 2019

New Israel Fund

SBSCT

Peace and Justice Fund

Women's World Day of Prayer, Germany

SIVMO

and many individual donors

Machsom Watch Needs Your Support!

Contact information

Website: <http://www.machsomwatch.org/en>

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