

נשים נגד הכיבוש ולמען זכויות אדם

نساء ضد الاحتلال ومن أجل حقوق الإنسان

Women against the Occupation and for Human Rights



Watchמחסום

## Annual Report 2020



Habla agricultural checkpoint, December 24, 2020. Photo: Ronny Perlman

# About MachsomWatch

Since 2001, MachsomWatch has observed, monitored, documented, and raised awareness about conditions faced by Palestinians 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 around 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 protesting the Occupation. We embody a democratic feminine civilian presence in military spaces. Our daily presence in front of soldiers and Palestinian civilians demonstrates that there are Israelis who oppose the Occupation. Playing the dissident role in Israeli society subjects us to challenges to our own free speech and the right to protest, even within a society that sees itself as democratic.

## Contact information

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# 2020: A Totally Different Kind of Year

This year was challenging to say the least. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent periodic lockdowns halted some of our activities and drastically changed the format of other activities. Closures within Israel were accompanied by periodic orders by the Palestinian Authority that placed the West Bank towns and villages under total closure.

## COVID-19 Lockdowns, Settler Violence, Ongoing Protest Demonstrations and Democracy Under Attack

While Israel was under month-long lockdowns twice in 2020 the Israeli settlers in the Occupied Territories were not deterred by COVID-19 and continued to perpetrate acts of violence, harassment, and vandalism. The settlers prevented shepherds from taking their herds to pasture in the Jordan Valley, drove over planted fields, set fires, and cut down olive trees in different areas of the West Bank. Regretfully, the army often stands by while these acts take place and does not offer protection to the Palestinians.



MachsomWatch member at one of the demonstrations against the prime minister

The ongoing public and mass protests against the prime minister and the current government, and the increasing threats posed to Israel's democracy have energized many of our members and have reinforced what we have understood for a long time: that Israel's democracy is not stable and many forces, including the Occupation and human rights abuses, contribute to its demise.



# Our Focus in 2020

## Monitoring Checkpoints

Our volunteers carried out **almost 400 checkpoint visits** in 2020. In March, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we contacted our Palestinian friends and acquaintances who reported to us **in over 150 conversations** about their situation. All our reports were added to our website in Hebrew and English.



Overcrowding at al-Zeitim Checkpoint. Photo: Anat Tueg

Our reports at the checkpoints detailed overcrowding, traffic jams, garbage not removed, and other unexpected delays. We were regularly approached by Palestinians asking for help getting permits.

Our reports also noted that some of the checkpoints were closed or simply empty as Palestinians were passing through openings in the security barrier which suddenly appeared and were not monitored from the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. The Israeli army is aware of it, sees it, and does not respond. Palestinian workers told MachsomWatch members that because of COVID-19, the Palestinian Authority would not allow workers to return home unless they had been in Israel for three weeks. By crossing through holes in the fence, they were able to return home stealthily each day.



Passing to Israel through holes in the separation fence. Photo: MachsomWatch



Workers from Beit Ijza north of Jerusalem returning from a night shift speak with MachsomWatch volunteer. Photo: Natanya Ginsburg



## Maintaining a Regular Presence in the Jordan Valley

In the **Jordan Valley**, the harsh conditions, poverty, and violence continued without pause. Our team conducted regular visits to the Jordan Valley and received ongoing updates from Palestinian residents when we were unable to visit during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

MachsomWatch activists successfully initiated a complaint through Adv. Eitay Mack to the army to remove a dirt barrier blocking the al-Farisiya shepherd community in the northern Jordan Valley, which was removed a few days later.

The looming threat of annexation led to international interest in this region. In February, we led a tour for US Congressional assistants, an American journalist, a Palestinian journalist, and five other Americans, including some who live permanently in Ramallah. We introduced the visitors to the people who live in the Jordan Valley and the severe challenges. In the village of al-Aqabah, the visitors met Hajj Sami who provided details about problems with the army. The village is in an area where many live fire ammunition drills are held, like in most of the Jordan Valley. The visitors also heard about the problems caused by the illegal outposts as well as the water shortages, as seen in the village of Bardala.



Journalists learn firsthand about Jordan Valley demolitions. Photo: Aviva Konforty

Later that month, we hosted a journalist from the Kyoto News Agency in Japan. In June, we took two **New York Times** journalists on a private tour of the Jordan Valley, where they learned about blockades and barriers that prevent access, water shortages, and demolitions. Meetings with Palestinians gave the journalists an opportunity to hear opinions about planned annexation.



New York Times journalist and photographer in the Jordan Valley. Photos: Nurit Popper

The following articles appeared as a result of this tour:

- David M. Halbfinger and Adam Rasgon, "[As Annexation Looms, Israeli Experts Warn of Security Risks](#)," *New York Times*, June 19, 2020
- Adam Rasgon, "[Palestinians in Jordan Valley Fear Annexation Would Choke Off Their Villages](#)," *New York Times*, June 24, 2020.

**Haaretz** journalists also turned to MachsomWatch and our members joined them in the Jordan Valley. A visit to **al-Hadidya** aired as a [podcast](#).

Our volunteers organized distributions of food supplies to some of the more distant shepherding communities in the Jordan Valley, such as **Fasail**, and to dozens of families in **Khan al-Akhmar, Makh'oul, Ein al-Beida, al-Burj** and **Mkasser**. These food deliveries made a difference to families who were unable to provide for themselves during the pandemic.



Sorting, selecting, and delivering produce to Jordan Valley families.

Photos: Nurit Popper and Daphne Banai



MachsomWatch continues to work with *Taayush* and *Engaged Dharma* in the Jordan Valley. Whenever possible, we join other activists in the Jordan Valley early in the morning to accompany Palestinian shepherds who are constantly harassed by Israeli settlers.



MachsomWatch volunteers accompanying Palestinian shepherds.  
Photos: Nurit Popper

**The Sea Days project** was cancelled this year due to COVID-19. Nevertheless, our volunteers managed to arrange an outing at one of the local springs in the Jordan Valley.

## Helping Blacklisted Palestinians

This team spends over 12 hours a week contacting people and helping them fill out forms and prepare requests that they be removed from the blacklists. This year people found themselves on the blacklist because they were from areas specifically affected by COVID-19. To remove their names from the blacklist, they needed a certificate of a negative COVID test and had to submit a request to be removed from the list.

Our work was also affected by the pandemic. It became more difficult to request letters from employers (required when requesting removal from the blacklist). This past year the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) also launched an online process, enabling many Palestinians to submit the requests themselves.

In 2020, 1489 requests were submitted. 437 (or 47%) were removed from the blacklists, out of a total of 922 requests that received an answer. We worked closely with two Hebron offices on these requests.

We received 23 positive verdicts out of 53 appeals (done with the help of Adv. Tamir Blank) against security and police blacklistings (compared to 190 petitioners in 2019). This year saw a decrease in the number of petitions due to the closures, which made it impossible to meet people to get the documents signed and to the economic crises brought by the pandemic which made impossible for people to afford the cost.



## Military CourtWatch

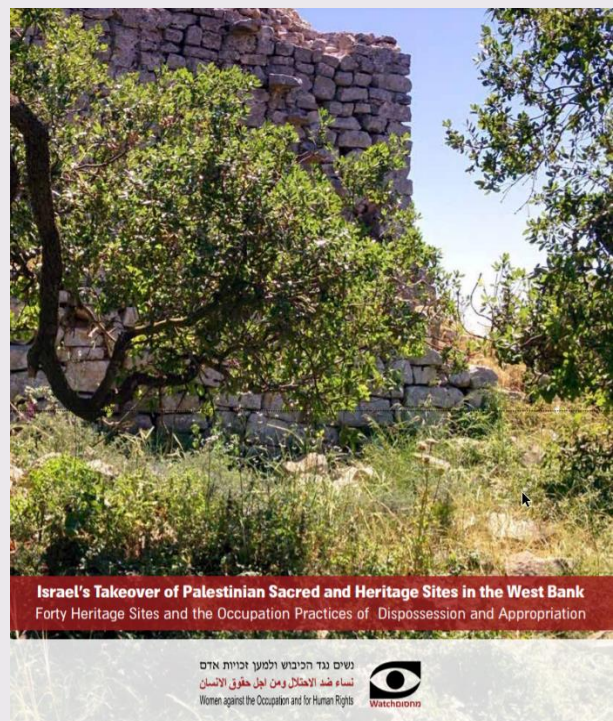
Our volunteer team of women who observe the military courts carried out a total of **10** shifts in January and February. Since March 2020, this activity has been suspended due to the pandemic. The number of hearings were reduced; cases have been conducted by video so prisoners do not need to be transported to court; and public access to the courts has been currently suspended. The Israeli prison service has also imposed restrictions under the Emergency Orders, preventing those arrested for security charges from seeing or speaking to their families or attorneys.

## The Maqam Project: Surveying Israel's Takeover of Traditional Palestinian Heritage Sites

During 2020, this team completed its extensive review of 40 historical, religious, and cultural sites to which access for Palestinians is limited or not available. The report is now available on our website in [Hebrew](#), [English](#), and [Arabic](#). We have been sharing this survey with various interested groups including journalists, members of Knesset, archeologists, historians, and academics.

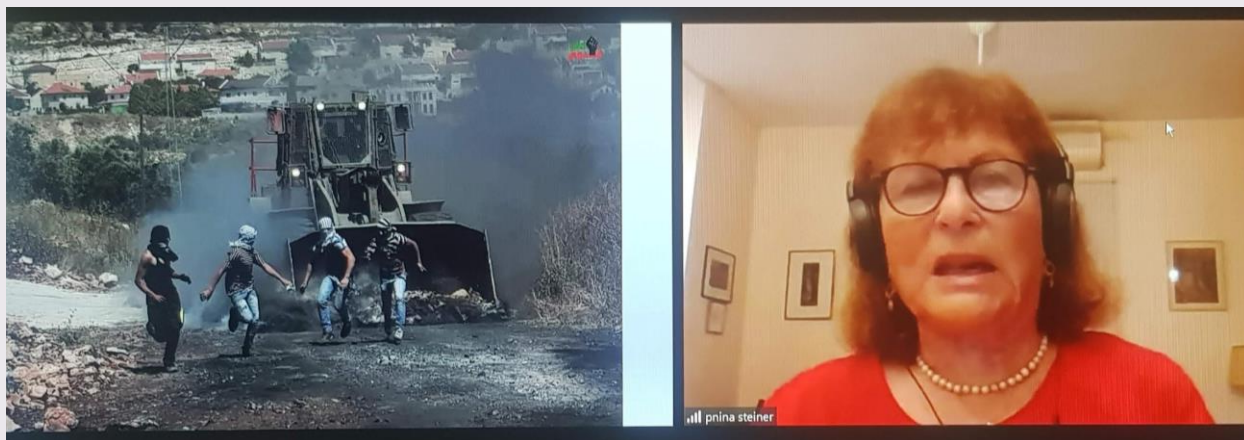
The *Middle East Monitor* ran [an article about our report](#). A member of MACHSOMWATCH published an article in **+972** about [Israel's takeover of these sites](#), which was republished by the website **Housing & Lands Right Network**.

The Maqam Team produced a short film called [E-Nabi Daniel and Other Maqam Sites](#), available in Hebrew and English.



## Tours and Lectures

During the short time period before the pandemic and lockdown, we held several tours for guests as well as for MACHSOMWATCH members.



A new tour to the Jordan Valley planned to begin in March and April had to be cancelled. Our reality tours are now on hold.

Instead of tours, we began planning monthly webinars around each of our activities. The first one focused on [the Village of Qaddum](#), one of the places in which our tours to the Central West Bank visit. This webinar was held in October and attended by 100 people, which was the maximum we could host. In November, we held a webinar about [the Jordan Valley](#), attended by close to 200 people. [Additional webinars will be presented throughout 2021.](#)

## Talks with Israeli Youth about the Occupation and Human Rights



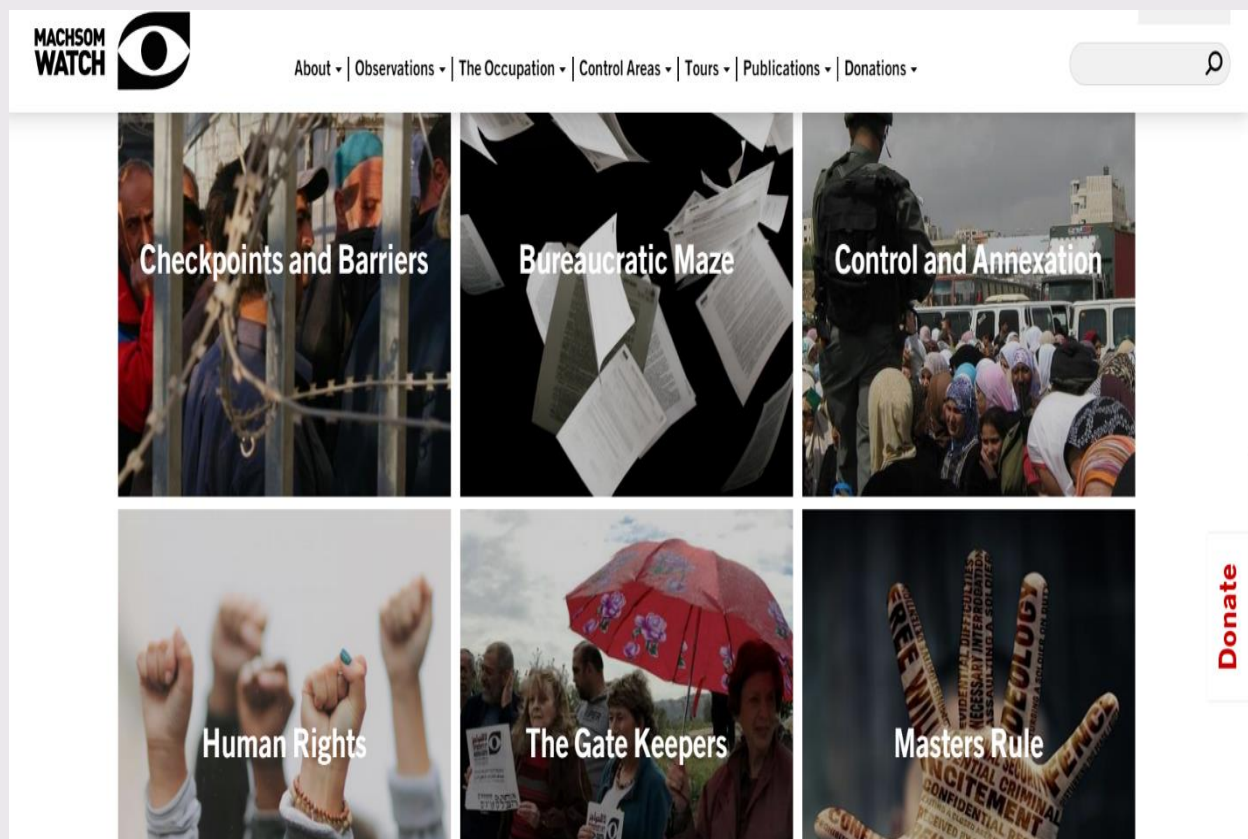
Discussion with a pre-military academy. Photo: MachsomWatch



In January and February, we held 12 meetings (two meetings included tours) with 550 young people in pre-military academies, a few schools, and a branch of Combatants for Peace. Due to COVID-19, all meetings were cancelled. In June, our meetings resumed and during this time, we met with 46 young people in two different pre-military academies. In December, we held two meetings: one in person with 36 young women attending a religious pre-military academy and the managing rabbi from Ofra—at their request.

## Media Outreach, Website, and Facebook

We were mentioned in over **20** media items in the Israeli and foreign press in 2020. Furthermore, we also appeared in several academic articles that were published in 2020. We also published **3** [newsletters](#) in Hebrew and English during 2020, which we shared with over **3,000** subscribers.



Significant efforts were directed at upgrading and redesigning both the content and the look of our website. The renewed website is now up and running and we are confident that the new design will interest users to explore the information in our site and learn about our work.

At the end of 2020, we had **7,369** followers on **Facebook**, slowly but steadily increasing since 2019. One of our posts reached nearly 5,000 people and many reached between 1,000 to 3,000 people. During this period, we had several posts that reached several thousand people each time.

On June 1, we launched a social media campaign against the planned Israeli annexation of the West Bank. We presented a different image each day, stating that annexation will not work and demanding that Israel end its claims to the Jordan Valley and suggest peace instead. On June 30, the final post in this campaign reached over 3000 people.



## Thank You for Your Support:

New Israel Fund

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Women's World Day of Prayer, Germany

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And many individual donors