

Egypt Proceeds With Underground Barrier on Border With Gaza

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

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Montreal – On December 17, an Egyptian newspaper with ties to the Egyptian government published a front page editorial defending the construction of an underground steel barrier along the length of the 14-kilometre Egyptian border with Gaza. According to the article, construction of the barrier is Egypt’s “sovereign right” and would be a mechanism to pressure Hamas to put an end to the smuggling of petrol and other supplies via tunnels under the border. Nevertheless, for many in Gaza, the Egyptian government is contributing directly to the deepening strangulation of the territory, and making itself an accomplice to the blockade imposed by Israel since June, 2007, when Hamas took control of Gaza.

While acting quite discretely, the Egyptian government continues to justify its actions through the pronouncements of its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ahmed Abou Gheit, who argues that “Egypt has the right to control its border.” Despite the quietness from the government about its plan, Egyptian locals report that work began as early as November, 2009. According to witnesses, steel plates 20-30 m. deep have been placed into the ground to cut the path of the tunnels, and other detection devices have also been added to those already in place.

Hundreds of tunnels have been dug along the Gaza-Egypt border, creating jobs for 15,000 and supporting a commerce of about \$1 million per day. Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is of the opinion that Egypt’s current approach avoids addressing the core reasons driving the Palestinians to resort to smuggling. “The erection of an underground wall will simply increase the suffering of the inhabitants of Gaza, and will lead to a deepening of the humanitarian catastrophe in the region. It will deprive the Gazans of their key means of survival,” says Tom Woodley, president of CJPME.

Even though they profess support for the Palestinian cause, the Egyptian authorities are worried by the rise of Hamas in Gaza and the possibility of a parallel movement in Egypt which would threaten the power structures currently in place. Egypt is also under strong American and Israeli pressure to lock down its border with Gaza in order to weaken Hamas’ grip on power.

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