

Israel's 'security' wall is world's largest protest graffiti

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From Satyagraha to wall graffiti... the journey of silent protest continues.

The eight-metre high and over 700 km-long security wall built by Israel to "secure" itself from the West Bank is now the world's largest canvas of protest graffiti.

The wall, bigger and longer than the Berlin Wall began to be constructed in 2002 and was completed this year. It roughly demarcates Israel from the West Bank but is "not the border" insist Israeli officials.

The wall was declared illegal by the International Court of Justice in 2004 and was ordered to be dismantled. However, the wall was not brought down and since then international protest is expressed in the form of a strikingly colourful graffiti of messages and slogans in English and Arabic on the West Bank side of the wall.

At places this graffiti runs for kilometers with one message merging into another. Symbols of protest, pictures, flowers, figures, birds, quotes from world leaders are splayed across the wall sending out silent signals of disapproval.

"The border between Israel and West Bank is 325 km but the wall runs for over 700 km. More than 80 per cent of the wall has been built on the Palestinian side which has led to the annexation of 9 per cent of the West Bank area into Israel," says Xavier Abu Eid, communication advisor to the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

The Israeli authorities on the other hand insist that the wall has been constructed to keep away the suicide bombers. "The security wall is mainly a fence and is concrete only near the urban areas. We agree that the wall is a source of inconvenience to people. But we had no option but to build the wall when suicide bombers were walking into our cities and shopping areas and blowing themselves up. The wall has led to a marked fall in such incidents," said a senior official of the Israeli government.

The Palestinians also rue the fact those whose livelihood was directly affected due to the construction of the land have not been compensated despite the order of the International Court of Justice. "At many places large tracts of fertile land and vital water resources have gone to the Israeli side because of the construction of this wall. Thousands are unable to access their land and factories and have been rendered unemployed," he adds.

Israeli officials, however, state that those who own land on the other side of the wall are allowed daily access through the checkpoints. "Hundreds of Palestinians cross over to the Israeli side every day for various purposes," stated the official.

"People from across the world come to paint this wall. It was decided to keep the wall painted with slogans of protest and hope till it is brought down. Those who painted these messages want to be a part of the moment when it will be brought down," says Abu Eid.

In this battle of "two rights" the protest graffiti's message is loud and clear. "Non-violence is the key to peace," says a message on the wall attributing it to Mahatma Gandhi.