

As West Bank Village Faces Extinction, New York Times Looks the Other Way

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Global Research, July 21, 2015

[TimesWarp](#) 20 July 2015

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Bulldozers are poised outside the West Bank village of Susiya, deployed in advance of their stated mission—the razing of homes, animal shelters, cisterns, clinics and schools and the eviction of some 300 Palestinian residents, all to make way for Jewish settlers.

The [arrival of the bulldozers](#) this month did not come as a surprise. Susiya's struggle to survive has been in the Israeli and international news for at least three years. Its case has reached to the [Israeli Supreme Court](#), and its cause has drawn protests from local and international activists, members of the U.S. Congress and even the Department of State, which spoke against the demolition this past week.

Despite all this, *The New York Times* has had nothing to say about Susiya, although the story is eminently newsworthy and has appeared often of late in Israeli and international media and in the reports of human rights groups.

Palestinians [have lived in Susiya for centuries](#), written records of a community at that site in the South Hebron Hills go back to 1830, and it appears on British Mandate maps from 1917, but none of this counts in the eyes of Israeli settlers and officials, who are determined to remove the residents from their homes and land.

Settlers have been encroaching on Susiya since 1983 when they established an illegal colony near the village. Three years later the Israeli army's Civil Administration, which runs affairs in the West Bank, expelled the residents from their traditional village land and turned it over to the settlers, who now run it as an archaeological site.

The villagers have twice been forced to move since then, setting up homes nearby only to be driven out by the army each time. Since their third expulsion in 2001 they have lived on their agricultural fields, constantly under threat of losing their final hold on the land.

Today, the residents of Susiya have [no connection to water or electrical services](#), and their homes are under demolition orders. The Civil Administration has [refused their attempts](#) to qualify for utility services, and the Israeli Supreme Court has allowed the army to proceed with demolitions in spite of all appeals.

This treatment is in flagrant contrast with a "generous planning policy" that Israeli grants the settlers. As the Israeli rights group [B'Tselem notes](#), "The settlers of Susya and its outposts enjoy full provision of services and infrastructure and are in no danger of their homes being demolished—despite the fact that the outposts are illegal under Israeli law and in the settlement itself...23 homes were built on private Palestinian land."

Meanwhile, Susiya residents spend a [third of their income for water](#) to be tanked in, paying five times the price paid by the nearby settlers who are served by the water network.

Israeli has confiscated 370 acres of Susiya's land, and settlers prevent the villagers from accessing another 500 acres. Now the settlers, backed by the state, are pressing to have it all.

In the face of this patent discrimination and injustice, Susiya has found support from a number of champions in Israel and abroad. Rabbis for Human Rights, an Israeli group, helped take the case to the Supreme Court. Jewish Voice for Peace, Rebuilding Alliance, the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, and others in the United States are pressing members to take action through petitions and phone calls to representatives.

And this support reaches beyond the activist community to government officials. On June 7 this year all [28 European Union member states](#) with consulates in Jerusalem sent representatives to Susiya to stand in solidarity with the villagers.

More striking still, the campaign on behalf of the impoverished village has reached the halls of the U.S. Congress and state department. Last week Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-CA) sent an [open letter](#) to Secretary of State John Kerry asking him to intervene and help save Susiya. [Ten members](#) of the house joined her in signing.

The state department took notice and spoke out. At a [press briefing on Thursday](#) spokesperson John Kirby took a question about the fate of Susiya, and he was prepared with a detailed answer: The department "strongly urges" Israel to refrain from "any demolitions in the village." Such actions would be "harmful and provocative," they would "worsen the atmosphere" and "set a damaging standard." The message was clear.

This made the news in Israel, but *The New York Times* remained silent. It had nothing to say when the 28 EU consulates took part in an act of solidarity with Susiya. It made no mention of the Eshoo letter. Now it has studiously avoided the remarks by Kirby at the state department last week.

The *Times* would prefer to say nothing about the case of Susiya, which exposes the Israeli occupation in all its worst manifestations. To report the full story would damage the fictional narrative promoted by Israel and the *Times*: that the West Bank is "disputed territory" fought over by two equal sides and Palestinians are terrorizing the settlers.

If the pressure becomes great enough, if other mainstream media begin to report on the threats to Susiya and the protests at the highest levels of the U.S. government, the *Times* may have to relent. Then it will be instructive to see how it manages to play catch-up and, we expect, strive to give the story an Israeli spin.

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