

Israel's Policy is Demolition and Destruction: Four Schools Demolished in West Bank, Palestinians' Only Option

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Israeli occupation forces demolished Palestinian schools in four West Bank communities ahead of the new scholastic year, depriving several hundred children of proper classrooms and forcing some to meet under the sun or in makeshift tents.

All the schools were destroyed under the pretext that they did not have building permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

A total of 55 schools are presently threatened with demolition and "stop work" edicts.

Last month, Holland complained to the Israeli government after Dutch solar panels providing electricity to a school in the village of Abu Nawar were confiscated.

Norwegian Refugee Council Director Hanibal Abiy Worku said:

"Just when they were due to return to the classroom, Palestinian children are discovering their schools are being destroyed."

He asked:

"What threat do these schools pose to the Israeli authorities? What are they planning to achieve by denying thousands of children their fundamental right to education?"

Roy Yellin of the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem answered his second question by saying the systematic demolitions are "designed to drive Palestinians from their land".

And their country, if I might add.

More than 300 EU and internationally funded structures in the occupied West Bank were demolished last year, the highest number since Palestinians began to record demolitions.

As the occupying power, Israel is legally obliged to provide education, as well as other essential services to Palestinians living in areas under its control. But Israel has never

assumed its obligations, which have largely been performed by the UN, foreign governments and international organisations.

Consequently, Israel has escaped its fundamental responsibilities. Having achieved freedom from these responsibilities, Israel has routinely tried to destroy facilities — schools, wells, roads and public structures — provided to the Palestinians by outsiders who rarely complain or make a high-profile fuss.

Demolition and destruction of anything meant to serve Palestinians is one aspect of Israel's policy towards them.

Israel is granted everlasting impunity and is certain to ignore the European Union demand that it reconstruct or return the school buildings it has demolished or seized.

At this time, Israel can afford to dismiss criticism and complaints from Europe and the Arab world for two reasons. First, the international community is preoccupied with multiple crises in this region and derived from this region: the Syrian conflict, the campaign against Daesh, the pointless war destroying Yemen, and taqfiri-linked attacks in Europe and elsewhere.

Few politicians notice what Israel is doing in the occupied Palestinian territories, formerly the focus of regional international attention.

Concern for Palestinians has been overtaken by massive flows of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere into Europe.

Empathy and a desire to help these refugees have ebbed, and European governments are now deporting to Greece those who first landed in that country although it is suffering from a devastating economic crisis.

Second, the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency has created serious uncertainty over the country's regional policies.

Although Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had more than 20 meetings with US officials since Trump's inauguration, he has no idea what his administration plans to do on the Palestine-Israel front.

He said Washington is in "chaos".

While some Trump envoys reiterated to him the US commitment to the "two-state solution", involving the emergence of a Palestinian state, and US opposition to colony construction the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Abbas said he does not know what these envoys told Israel.

Although he refrained from saying so, Abbas' concern must have deepened when, during the visit of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and envoy Jason Greenblatt, the "two-state solution" was not mentioned although it has been the basis of US and international peace efforts for more than two decades.

Palestinian officials quoted by Israel's liberal daily Haaretz said the US team was not only "biased in Israel's favour", but was also "reciting [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu's talking points".

This is hardly surprising because Kushner, Greenblatt and US Ambassador David Friedman are all strong supporters of Israel.

Kushner's father has long been a donor to Israel. When visiting the US on one occasion, Netanyahu spent a night at the Kushners' residence in New Jersey. Kushner enterprises hold in partnership with Israeli businessman Raz Steinmetz \$150 million worth of real estate in 15 buildings in New York City.

Greenblatt has lived for some time and performed guard duty at the Jewish seminary at the Etzion Bloc in the West Bank and does not see colonies as obstacles to peace.

His only contacts with Palestinians were with builders, gardeners and menial workers in that colony.

Friedman heads an institution that opposes the two-state solution and provides \$2 million a year to the West Bank Bet El colony, which secured donations from the Kushner family.

Trump has not ruled out the two-state solution, but said that only the sides can decide on how to proceed: "I'm looking at two-state and one-state" models, he stated last February, after taking office.

This means, of course, that Israel decides, as it is militarily, politically and economically in a position to dictate terms to the Palestinians and the international community.

Israel wants neither option, but to maintain the status quo while it builds colonies and demolishes Palestinian schools and houses.

The New York Times headline on the story about Kushner's visit said it all:

"For US Mideast negotiators, keeping the Palestinians involved is a victory."

After they left Ramallah, Kushner and Greenblatt issued a "two-line statement saying that the Palestinians had agreed not to bolt from the American-led process", Mark Landler, reported.

The Palestinians should have bolted precisely because it is led by Trump, and Trump has no intention of doing anything that would displease Netanyahu and Israel's hawks.

Arab cheerleaders who expressed optimism over the Kushner-Greenblatt visit should be ashamed. Instead, they should have encouraged Abbas to boycott.

The Palestinians' only option is to resume initiatives on the international scene in the hope that European governments — fed up with the US refusal to exert pressure on Netanyahu and Israel's cruel demolitions of European-built Palestinian schools and other essential infrastructure — might tell the Israelis "enough!"

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