

Israeli Bulldozers Continue to Demolish Palestinian Homes in Jerusalem and Occupied West Bank

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According to a local information centre, in the past decade alone, Israel has demolished 200 housing units in occupied East Jerusalem leaving 440 Palestinians homeless. In the cruellest and most vicious way, the occupation forces obliged the owners of these houses to demolish their own properties or be charged for the Israelis to do it. The Israeli authorities issue demolition orders and impose huge fines — amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars — on Palestinian Jerusalemites who are already strained financially. It is an outrageous and under-reported injustice.

The same Israeli information centre reports that from January 2006 until 31 May 2020, **Israel demolished at least 1,554 Palestinian residential units in the occupied West Bank (not including East Jerusalem), causing 6,780 people - including at least 3,403 minors — to lose their homes.** The figures reported by the Palestinian Colonisation and Wall Resistance Commission are much higher. It says that the occupying authorities demolished 6,114 Palestinian homes in the West Bank and Jerusalem over the past decade. We should also consider the 19,000 homes destroyed by Israel during its three military offensives against the Palestinians in Gaza since 2008/9.

The Commission documented the demolition of 1,841 houses in the city of Jerusalem alone from 2009 until July last year. In a provocative manifestation of arrogance and sadism, apartheid Israel often uses the pretext that the buildings were built “without a permit”. Israeli courts rule routinely that the structures have violated a construction ban. In reality, it’s almost impossible for a Palestinian to obtain a building permit from the Israeli authorities.

There is tiny amount of land allocated for construction and the Israeli-run Jerusalem Municipality routinely denies Palestinian applications for such permits. As such, they find themselves forced to violate the unmanageable and crippling Israeli orders and build or extend their homes “illegally” without permits.

According to the Palestinian Land Research Centre, since the Nakba in 1948, the Israelis have wiped more than 500 Palestinian towns and villages off the face of the earth, and an estimated 170,000 homes have been demolished. During the Nakba, of course, around 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes by armed terrorist groups. There are now an estimated seven million Palestinians in the global diaspora.

While Israel continues to demolish Palestinian homes, it is building more and more on illegal

settlements on occupied Palestinian land. This has continued even during the so-called “peace process”; the number of Israeli settlements on land occupied since 1967 doubled from 144 pre-Oslo to 515 in 2018. There are even more now.

Israel’s demolition policy is enforced within the context of a comprehensive strategy targeting the Palestinian presence, particularly in Jerusalem and the West Bank. The discernible target is to have large swathes of the West Bank emptied of the indigenous population and annexed to Israel.

The story doesn’t start with Donald Trump’s promises; it’s well-established in the doctrines espoused by Israeli politicians since the 1967 Allon Plan which proposed that Israel relinquish the main Palestinian population centres in the West Bank to Jordan while retaining land along the Jordan Valley under Israeli military control. In fact, Israel’s founding ideology, Zionism, has always sought to get as much Palestinian land, with as few Palestinians on it, as possible.

The ultimate goal of the apartheid system in Israel is to keep Palestinian communities in Jerusalem besieged and marginalised in the hope that they will move out voluntarily. The areas thus emptied of their residents will be classified as “nature reserves” or “military zones” in which Palestinians are forbidden to live. Settlements will then appear, as such a restriction doesn’t apply to Jewish settlers.

While this has been happening for decades, there are reportedly new tactics to replace Jerusalemites. Palestinian middlemen apparently financed by Israeli settlers’ organisations and, shockingly, by individuals in the United Arab Emirates are trying to buy land for use by others. This was exposed early last year when the deputy head of the Islamic Movement in Israel accused agents from the UAE of attempting to buy a home near Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem. Sheikh Kamal Al-Khatib accused the UAE’s Tahnoun Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan of being behind this endeavour.

Although the attempt failed despite the owners being offered \$20 million, an investigation showed that some of the Palestinians involved in buying houses in Jerusalem received funds from a company owned by **Mohammed Dahlan**, the former Fatah official who has lived in the UAE since 2011. Dahlan was expelled from Fatah by Palestinian **President Mahmoud Abbas** and is now a serious political rival. He also works as a special adviser to Emirati **Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed**.

Back in 2019, Amnesty International stated clearly that,

“These demolitions are a flagrant violation of international law and part of a systematic pattern by the Israeli authorities to forcibly displace Palestinians in the occupied territories; such actions amount to war crimes.”

Moreover, the European Union reiterated that Israel’s demolition policy in occupied territory is illegal under international law. The Palestinian Authority should thus be acting to take Israel to the international courts for these violations.

The PA’s legal case can rely on documents dating back to the Ottoman era from the archive in Turkey which proves Palestinian ownership of land and buildings well before the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. This may not stop house demolitions and further ethnic cleansing, but at least it will serve to expose even further the brutal nature of Israel’s

apartheid regime.

Palestinian refugees — like all other refugees anywhere in the world — have a legitimate right to return to their land; that's the law. If Israel allowed them to return, then they would not be forced to build and extend homes "illegally" without permits. Nor would they be forced to demolish their own homes to avoid paying Israel to do so.

There is a clear breach of human rights and international law happening in front of our eyes. Palestinian Jerusalemites shouldn't be left alone to face the Israeli bulldozers. We must stand in solidarity and do something about this massive injustice.

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