



WORLD WEEK FOR PEACE IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL, 2016

DEMOLITIONS

FACTS

- Since 2012, 2401 Palestinian homes and other structures have been demolished in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), including East Jerusalem. ¹
- In 2015, 544 demolitions were recorded by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), displacing 757 people. ¹
- So far in 2016, 769 demolitions have been carried out, leaving over 1000 Palestinians homeless.²

GENERAL SITUATION

The demolition of Palestinian homes in the occupied territories is illegal under international law. Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states: "Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons...is prohibited." Under this provision the practice of demolishing individual Palestinian homes is illegal, as is the wholesale destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure.

The government of Israel justifies demolitions on the grounds that the family lack Israeli planning and building permits. However, these are routinely denied to Palestinians, making them vulnerable to home demolitions. This burden comes on top of challenges already enforced by living under military occupation, limited rights to water, controls over daily movement, displacement, inadequate housing and intermittent education.

The families of those who have committed attacks against Israelis are often subjected to their homes being demolished as punishment. These demolitions are carried out whatever the circumstances of any alleged incident. Families have to live with the uncertainty and fear this action brings. Their neighbours may also be anxious for their safety. Often homes or structures are demolished because of their nearness to military installations or operations (see case study below).

So why do Palestinians build if they know their houses are likely to be demolished? It is often because they have no choice. Despite living under Israeli occupation for 49 years, the population of Palestine is booming and large families are common. At present most young couples and their children live with their parents in inadequate, overcrowded conditions. Many are left with little or no choice but to build extra floors on their

existing home, or to build a new property on their land, without proper planning permission, knowing that Israel has issued tens of thousands of demolition orders and hoping it will not happen to them.

CASE STUDY



© ICHAD host and small son in the family tent

This story comes from a recent study tour group led by the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), who visited Khibet al-Makhul, a small tented herding community in the West Bank. Permission was given to reproduce this story.

The head of one of the families living in the village told this story:

“The people living here used to be nomadic, part of the Bedouin heritage, but have stayed here now for 40 years. Many of us are refugees from Hebron originally. We rely on livestock for a living, selling milk and cheese, and animals on religious holidays. Israel’s prohibitions on our grazing lands makes it very difficult to sustain this way of life, added to which is the expense of having to buy animal feed. With the depletion of our natural water supply, we are completely dependent on bringing in water tankers for the animals and ourselves. Even though we now live in tents and shacks, Israel still imposes building restrictions on us.”³

Because we live in Area C (under full Israeli civil and security control), we are not entitled to claim help from the Palestinian Authority. An Israeli military camp has squatted on the adjacent hilltop overlooking us since the 1970’s. In 2013 they demolished the compound here, on the same day as the 21st anniversary of the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Four bulldozers, 17 jeeps and many soldiers arrived without warning in the early morning. They demolished the tin shacks and tents my family were living in, leaving us without any shelter, completely exposed.

Israel's aggression against the Al-Makhul community began in 1967 when the IDF began their tactics of intimidation. Sometimes they shot our livestock; other times, they 'confiscated' them and took them to Jericho, from where we (the farmers) could only recover the livestock by paying a fine. From that time onwards, threats, confiscations and demolitions have continued until today.

When I hear about events such as the recent massacres in Paris, my heart breaks, so why do people not condemn Israel for what it is doing to us?

We have no rights, no one to protect us. After sunset I can't sleep, because I'm afraid of Israeli settlers, especially after the recent [arson attack that killed a Palestinian family in Duma](#)⁴. There had been several settler attacks on a neighbouring community, so I am afraid of every car that passes. When our home was demolished, my 5-year-old daughter asked me, 'Why do they do it?' No one could answer her."

After the study group returned to the UK, they were distressed to learn that their host's humble dwelling had been ransacked by Israeli soldiers a few days after their visit. They entered the tent without warning, trashed the family's few basic possessions and threw out all their food.

1. <http://www.ochaopt.org/content/monthly-figures>
2. <http://www.ochaopt.org/content/protection-civilians-weekly-report-16-22-august-2016>
3. <http://www.acri.org.il/en/category/arab-citizens-of-israel/negev-bedouins-and-unrecognized-villages/>
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/03/israel-indicts-jewish-extremists-for-arson-attack-that-killed-palestinian-family>