

FORCED DISPLACEMENT

IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL



**American Friends
Service Committee**

Forced Displacement in Palestine and Israel

On June 27th, 2013 the Israeli Civil Administration* in the West Bank issued 34 demolition orders against Palestinian homes and buildings in the village of Susiya. These follow 52 demolition orders issued against structures in the village in August 2012. Every structure in the village is now under threat of demolition, and the community's 250 residents are all at risk of being forcibly displaced from their homes.

This is not the first time that the residents of Susiya have been in this position.

Established in the early 1800s, Susiya is a small herding community located in the south of the Israeli occupied West Bank.¹ In 1986, Israel declared the site of the original village a national park and forcibly displaced all of the village's 400 residents from their homes. Villagers quickly resettled in caves, tents, and homes they built on land that they owned nearby. The Israeli military completely destroyed this new community in 2001, and mass demolitions of rebuilt homes and structures have occurred on several occasions since then. Nearly half of the village population has been permanently forcibly displaced from their homes and village as a result of these demolitions.



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* Despite its name, the Civil Administration is the military body set up by Israel to oversee administrative and legal issues in the occupied Palestinian territory. In the West Bank it is the body with responsibility for all decisions related to Palestinian life in Area C, which is the 61 percent of the West Bank that remains under full Israeli control.

The forced displacement of Palestinians in Susiya is not unique. Nearby herding communities including Safai, Majaz, Tabban, Fakhit, Halaweh, Mirkez, Jinba, and Hillet A-Dab—most of which have been in existence since the 1800s—are all threatened with demolition because the Israeli military has declared the area where they are located a closed military zone (known as Firing Zone 918).²

Palestinians in Fasayil, Jerusalem, Al-Aqaba, Beit Lahiya, Silwan, Sheikh Jarrah, Al-Araqib, and more than 100 other communities also live under the constant threat of being forcibly displaced by the Israeli military, civil administration, or police.

This paper provides background information on how and why Palestinians are forcibly displaced.

When did the forced displacement of Palestinians start?

Forced displacement is at the heart of the conflict. At the start of the 20th century less than 5percent of the population of historic Palestine was Jewish. By 1948 the Jewish population in the area had grown to over 30percent of the total population as a result of mass immigration from Europe, with most immigrants arriving from Europe after 1920. When the partition plan was proposed by the UN in 1947, this Jewish population owned approximately 7percent of the land of historic Palestine and constituted only a slim majority (55percent) of the population in the area designated for the new Jewish state. Even within this area, only one of the sub-districts allocated for the Jewish state had a majority Jewish population.³ Forcibly displacing the Palestinian population was thus the only way to ensure a sustainable Jewish majority in the new state and plans to ethnically cleanse the Palestinian population were therefore developed.⁴

During 1947 and 1948, Israel systematically demolished 531 Palestinian villages inside the area that became Israel. More than 200 of these villages were destroyed, and between 250,000 and 350,000 people were displaced before May 1948 when the first Arab-Israeli war officially began. Ultimately, approximately 750,000 Palestinians were displaced in 1948 as a result of the war and the systematic demolition of Palestinian towns and villages. In 1967 Israel took over the West Bank and Gaza, displacing even more Palestinians. These people's rights to compensation and return were never fulfilled, and they and their descendants remain refugees today.⁵ Resolving the conflict requires acknowledging and addressing this historic injustice.

What is the legal status of the occupied Palestinian territory?

The West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem are all considered militarily occupied territories under international law. Their status as occupied territory is universally acknowledged by the international community, including the U.S. government. While Israel has argued that it ceased occupying Gaza in 2005 when it redeployed its troops and withdrew settlers from Gaza, it remains the position of the international community including the U.S.,⁶ the EU, and the UN⁷ that Gaza remains occupied. Within occupied territory, international humanitarian law (particularly the 4th Geneva Convention⁸) is the legal framework that regulates and outlines the rights and duties of both the occupied people (Palestinians) and the occupying power (Israel).

What is the leading trigger for forced displacement in the occupied Palestinian territory?

Home demolitions are the leading trigger for forced displacement in the occupied Palestinian territory. According to the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions, since 1967, Israel has demolished more than 26,000 Palestinian-owned structures in the occupied Palestinian territory. There are three main types of demolitions: punitive demolitions, administrative demolitions, and military/land-clearing demolitions.⁹

Punitive demolitions

Punitive demolitions are carried out to “punish” people who are associated with the home being destroyed and who have been accused of taking part in actions considered illegal by Israel, i.e. political organizing or acts of violence. Demolished homes are often not owned by those accused of taking part in these actions, but rather by their extended family.¹⁰ The Israeli military temporarily halted punitive demolitions in 2005, but resumed this practice in 2009. Punitive demolitions account for approximately 6 percent of all home demolitions in the occupied Palestinian territory.¹¹

Administrative demolitions

Administrative demolitions are carried out against buildings or structures built without the proper permits in Area C of the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, between May 2012 and April 2013, 464 Palestinian owned structures were demolished, including 399 in Area C and 65 in East Jerusalem. As a result, 402 people, over half children, were forcibly displaced. Administrative demolitions account for approximately 23 percent of all demolitions in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Demolitions in Area C

Under the Oslo Accords, the West Bank was divided into three administrative areas (Areas A, B, and C). Area C, which comprises 61 percent of the West Bank, is under the full control of the Israeli government through the Civil Administration in the West Bank. The Israeli Civil Administration has designated 70 percent of Area C for use by illegal Israeli settlements, nature reserves, closed military zones, and a restricted access area near the Wall. The remaining 30 percent of Area C is theoretically available for Palestinian use, but of this area only 1 percent is zoned for building. Nearly all of this zoned area is already built up. This means that nearly all building in Area C must be done “illegally” in areas where building is not allowed by Israel.

Even when Palestinians apply for permission, they are rarely granted building permits. According to information received from the Israeli Civil Administration by the Israeli organization Bimkom, between 2000 and 2007 only 91 applications (5.6 percent of submitted applications) for building permits submitted by residents of Area C were approved.¹² Any building or remodeling of structures in Area C carried out without a permit will result in the renovated or newly built structure receiving a demolition order. Palestinians in these areas therefore effectively have only two choices: 1. build illegally and risk being displaced as a result of home demolitions, or 2. move out of Area C and into Areas A or B, where building is regulated by the Palestinian Authority.



Demolitions in East Jerusalem

As a result of land confiscation for settlements, missing municipal planning schemes, and closed “green space” areas, only 13 percent of East Jerusalem land is available for Palestinian construction. Much of this area is already built up, and in the areas where open land is available for construction, building permits are rarely approved.¹³ According to the Jerusalem municipality at least 1,500 new housing units are needed each year in East Jerusalem to meet natural growth needs. In 2008, only 125 building permits were approved, allowing for the building of only 400 new units. This difference between needs and what is legally allowed leads to illegal building.¹⁴ Any home built or renovated without a permit is at risk of demolition. Between 2001 and 2010, an average of 82 Palestinian homes were demolished in East Jerusalem each year and at least 1,500 home demolition orders have been issued but not yet enforced. It is estimated that 20 percent of all Palestinian buildings in East Jerusalem have been constructed or renovated without permits, leaving as many as 60,000 Palestinians at risk of displacement.¹⁵



*An Israeli flag flies over a Palestinian home taken over by Israeli settlers in occupied East Jerusalem.
(Skip Scheil, 2012 Teeksphoto.org)*

Military/land clearing demolitions

Military or Land Clearing Demolitions include the demolition and destruction of Palestinian homes and structures during military operations. During the second Intifada, between 4,000 and 5,000 Palestinian homes were demolished in the course of military operations, including more than 2,500 structures in Gaza. Israel's systematic destruction of homes in the Rafah area of Gaza alone displaced as many as 50,000 people.¹⁶ During the same period, hundreds of homes were also destroyed in Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, and other locations.



Buildings destroyed during an Israeli aerial attack on Gaza.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs also estimates that 4,247 homes were demolished and nearly 15,000 were damaged during Israel's invasion of Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009 (Operation Cast Lead), displacing more than 150,000 people. Nearly 16,000 Gaza residents remain displaced as a result of these demolitions.¹⁷

Both international and local human rights organizations including Amnesty International,¹⁸ Human Rights Watch,¹⁹ B'tselem,²⁰ Al-Mezan,²¹ and Al-Haq²² along with UN agencies, have carefully documented these mass demolitions and have repeatedly held that they are carried out in flagrant violation of international humanitarian and human rights law.²³

Demolitions in the Gaza Restricted Access Area

The Gaza “restricted access area” is an area along the separation wall between Gaza and Israel where any Palestinian can be shot on sight by the Israeli military.²⁴ The restricted access area was first created during the second Intifada when Israel began enforcing a 150-meter no-go zone along the Eastern border of Gaza. At that time Israel also began systematically demolishing homes and structures in areas near the Gaza borders in the north and south of the Gaza Strip. In May 2009, the Israeli military announced an expansion of the restricted access area in leaflets they dropped on Gaza that warned people that anyone coming within 300 meters of the border could be shot. Additional homes and structures in this area were subsequently destroyed. In addition to the official 300-meter restricted access area, Israeli forces conduct regular raids one and two kilometers into Gaza and constantly monitor all areas up to two kilometers into Gaza. The land included in the restricted access area accounts for 17 percent of the total Gaza land area and includes 35 percent of Gaza’s agricultural land.²⁵ Research conducted by Save the Children UK in 2009 found that up to 70 percent of all households living near the restricted access area had been displaced at least once since 2000.²⁶



A remote controlled sniper nest located on the wall between Gaza and Israel and used to enforce the Gaza restricted access area.



Are home demolitions the only cause of forced displacement?

While home demolitions are the primary cause of displacement in the occupied Palestinian territory, they are not the sole cause of displacement.

A study conducted by Save the Children UK during 2009 concluded that Palestinians in Area C are also vulnerable to displacement as a result of being denied access to health services, basic sanitation, water and electricity, educational opportunities, and movement.²⁷ Similar restrictions on access to municipal services, free movement, educational facilities, religious institutions, and job opportunities have also forced many Palestinians out of Jerusalem.²⁸



Palestinian homes in the Area C village of Jiftlik in the Jordan valley.

Palestinians are also at risk of displacement as a result of having their residency rights revoked. In 1967, Israel unilaterally annexed East Jerusalem, although its right to control the area has not been recognized by the international community. Palestinian residents of Jerusalem were given Permanent Resident Status in the city but not full Israeli citizenship (which they have never sought). To maintain their status as “permanent residents” of the city, Palestinians from Jerusalem must prove that their “center of life” is in the city. Any Palestinian resident of Jerusalem who moves out of the city, either to another part of the occupied Palestinian territory or abroad (even temporarily), can have their residency rights revoked. Between 1967 and 2011 over 14,000 Palestinians had their residency rights in Jerusalem revoked and have thus permanently lost their right to live in or even visit the city of their birth.²⁹

According to the Israeli government, as many as 140,000 residents of the West Bank and Gaza (not including East Jerusalem) also had their residency rights revoked between 1967 and 1994 for political reasons or because they left the country for an extended period of time.³⁰

Is forced displacement limited to the occupied Palestinian territory?

Forced displacement is not limited to the occupied Palestinian territory. Within Israel, nearly 100,000 Palestinian “internal refugees” from 1948 live in more than 100 unrecognized villages. These communities are provided with no state services and all homes within them face a constant threat of demolition. As of May 2013, the unrecognized Palestinian village of

Al-Araqib had been demolished 50 times as part of an Israeli government effort to displace its residents to established cities.³¹

The Palestinian Bedouin population in the Negev is also at constant risk of displacement.³² In September 2011, the Israeli government approved the “Prawar Plan” which if implemented would result in the destruction of 35 Bedouin communities in the Negev and the forced displacement/relocation of the nearly 70,000 people who reside in these villages.³³ A revised version of this plan, known as the “Prawar-Begin Plan”³⁴ was put before the Knesset for consideration during June 2013.

Are corporations complicit in Israel’s forced displacement policy?

Caterpillar is the company most directly complicit in Israel’s home demolition policy. Caterpillar sells its bulldozers to the Israeli army through the United States Foreign Military Sales Program, despite knowing that its equipment is used in the commission of systematic human rights abuses. These sales are separate from the company’s regular supply chain for products sold to the general Israeli market. Once in Israel, D9 bulldozers are armored and modified to include machine gun mounts and grenade launchers.

In 2004, Amnesty International explained that, “More than 3,000 homes, hundreds of public buildings and private commercial properties, and vast areas of agricultural land have been destroyed by the Israeli army and security forces in Israel and the Occupied Territories in the past three and a half years. Tens of thousands of men, women and children have been forcibly evicted from their homes and made homeless or have lost their source of livelihood. Thousands of other houses and properties have been damaged, many beyond repair. In addition, tens of thousands of other homes are under threat of demolition, their occupants living in fear of forced eviction and homelessness ... Thousands of families have had their homes and possessions destroyed under the blades of the Israeli army’s U.S.-made Caterpillar bulldozers.”³⁵

As a result, Amnesty International recommended that, “Caterpillar Inc., the U.S. company which produces the bulldozers used by the Israeli army, should take measures—within the company’s sphere of influence—to guarantee that its bulldozers are not used to commit human rights violations, including the destruction of homes, land and other properties.” Human Rights Watch,³⁶ the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,³⁷ War on Want,³⁸ and the Presbyterian Church USA,³⁹ among others, have all made similar recommendations to Caterpillar, to no avail.

What can you do?

Support rebuilding efforts: Each year the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions partners with Palestinians whose homes have been demolished to help them rebuild. More information about their work can be found here: <http://www.icahd.org/rebuilding-camps>.

The Jordan Valley Solidarity Committee, a grassroots group, also implements innovative programming to help Palestinians at risk of displacement in the Jordan Valley remain on their land. More information about their work can be found here: <http://www.jordanvalleysolidarity.org/>

Support a ban Cat campaign: Due to its continued provision of support to the Israeli military, Caterpillar is the target of a number of boycott and divestment campaigns. You can show your support for ending home demolitions by supporting these campaigns that push for changes in Caterpillar's corporate policies. More information about these campaigns is available here: <http://www.endtheoccupation.org/section.php?id=158>

Learn more

The following organizations in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel address and challenge Israel's forced displacement policy.

- Al-Haq: <http://www.alhaq.org/>
- Al-Mezan: <http://www.mezan.org/en/>
- Badil: <http://www.badil.org/>
- The Civic Coalition for Defending Palestinians' Rights in Jerusalem: <http://www.civiccoalition-jerusalem.org/>
- Ma'an Development Center: <http://www.maan-ctr.org/>
- The Palestinian Counseling Center: <http://www.pcc-jer.org/english/>
- Jordan Valley Solidarity: <http://www.jordanvalleysolidarity.org/>
- B'Tselem: <http://www.btselem.org/>
- Adallah: <http://adalah.org/eng/>
- The Association for Civil Rights in Israel: <http://www.acri.org.il/en/>
- Bimkom: <http://bimkom.org.il/eng/>
- Ir Amin: <http://eng.ir-amim.org.il/>
- Zochrot: <http://zochrot.org/en>



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About AFSC

Since 1948, AFSC has worked in the U.S., Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territory with Palestinians, Israelis, and other committed activists to support nonviolence, challenge oppression, and (since 1970) to end Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. This work is guided by our "Principles for a Just and Lasting Peace in Palestine and Israel."⁴⁰ These principles support the implementation of international human rights and humanitarian law and call for an end to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, implementation of refugees' right of return, equality, and justice for Palestinians and Israelis.

July 2013

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End Notes

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2. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/011/2013/en/71e53d50-0788-445e-a972-e8db0bc89a22/mde150112013en.html>
3. <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Maps/Story574.html>
4. <http://imeu.net/news/article0023923.shtml>
5. <http://imeu.net/news/article0023923.shtml>
6. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154463.htm>
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8. <http://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/380>
9. http://www.ica hd.org/sites/default/files/Demolishing%20Homes%20Demolishing%20Peace_1.pdf
10. For an example of this practice see: <http://www.alhaq.org/publications/publications-index/item/israel-s-attack-on-beit-rima>
11. http://www.ica hd.org/sites/default/files/Demolishing%20Homes%20Demolishing%20Peace_1.pdf
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13. http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_jerusalem_report_2011_03_23_web_english.pdf
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21. http://www.mezan.org/en/details.php?id=11208&ddname=castlead2&id_dept=22&id2=9&p=center
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25. <http://www.mezan.org/upload/13210.pdf>
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39. <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2010/7/6/committee-recommends-denouncing-caterpillar-action/>
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