

Briefing: effect of Israeli demolitions on Palestinian communities

War on Want is a registered charity¹ campaigning against the root causes of poverty and human rights violation, as part of the worldwide movement for global justice. We have worked for many years on upholding the human rights of Palestinians, including through exposing Israel's use of house demolition as part of a wider picture of oppression against Palestinians. We therefore welcome the debate in Parliament focussing on the effects of Israeli demolitions on Palestinian communities.

Summary

Palestinian communities in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) are at imminent risk of forcible transfer at the hands of Israeli authorities. Thousands have already been displaced, and the education and livelihoods of even more effected, by demolitions throughout the years. The demolition of Palestinian structures violates numerous elements of international humanitarian law, including the prohibition of forcible displacement, a war crime. Coupled with Israel's ongoing expansion of its illegal settlements in the oPt, the dramatic increase in the demolition of Palestinian structures shows Israel's blatant disregard for standards of international law and intransigence on the issue.

Recommendations

The UK Government must take active steps to ensure accountability for violations of Palestinian rights, in particular when those violations are breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

To this end, the UK Government should:

- Raise the issue of demolitions and forcible transfer at Israel's Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations Human Rights Council in January 2018.
- Through DFID, ensure that UK development support to the oPt includes a commitment to ensuring that Palestinians can effectively access international accountability mechanisms in order to hold Israel accountable for its violations under international law, in line with the recommendation by the [UN Development Assistance Framework for OPT \(2018-2022\)](#).
- Demand compensation from the Government of Israel for demolished structures funded in part by the UK.
- Implement accountability mechanisms for strict adherence to IHL in the oPt, including the suspension of arms exports to Israel in accordance with the [Consolidated EU and national arms export licencing criteria](#) (Criterion 2, “..The respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country of final destination as well as respect by that country for international humanitarian law.”)
- Take steps to ensure that no UK corporations are involved in aiding and abetting property destruction carried out by Government of Israel in the oPt, in line with the UK national action plan on business and human rights/UN guiding principles on business and human rights.

¹ registered charity number 208724

Israeli demolitions in numbers

Palestinian properties—including homes, schools and agricultural structures—have been subject to confiscation and/or demolition. This includes a number of structures funded by the EU (and by extension, by the UK).

- In 2016, Israel demolished 1,094 Palestinian structures, a dramatic increase from 2015 and the highest number since 2009 when recording began. (source: UNOCHA UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the oPt)
- In 2016, 1601 Palestinians were displaced as a result of these demolitions, and countless lost important elements of their livelihoods. (source: UNOCHA)
- So far in 2017, the number of property demolitions in East Jerusalem alone has exceeded 120 already. (source: UNOCHA)
- Palestinian citizens of Israel are also subjected to unequal access to building permits, and their communities have also been targeted with demolitions and displacement, particularly the Bedouin communities in the Naqab/Negev. (source: Adalah)

Impact on families and communities

Palestinian families and communities face intolerable pressure in living under the constant threat of losing their homes. They also face strict and unreasonable restrictions on planning, the majority of Palestinians who apply for building permits have their applications rejected or ignored. Demolitions are often carried out with no warning of the date, with families left with no time to save their possession or find alternative housing. Whilst homes are often targeted for demolition, the Israeli authorities have also issued demolition orders against schools, health clinics, infrastructure such as roads and water supplies. Demolitions are also carried out with a high military presence causing further intimidation and fear for Palestinian families.

Demolitions violate UK, international, and international humanitarian law

The UN has raised concerns over Israel's practice of house demolitions, highlighting them as a breach of international human rights and humanitarian law.

- The majority of structure demolitions are carried out for having been built without Israeli-issued permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. Even on their own private property, where most demolition orders are concentrated, Palestinians are not granted permits for building even small structures, such as pens for goats or chickens. ***The destruction of property in occupied territory is prohibited under international humanitarian law.***
- At the same time, Israel's illegal settlements in the same areas are expanding at record pace, showing radical disparity in the law and application of law. ***Israel's settlements are illegal under UK and international law, and the transfer of population to them constitutes a war crime.***
- A number of house demolitions are a part of a policy of 'punitive house demolitions', carried out to punish the relatives of Palestinians accused of crimes or attempted crimes. ***Punitive house demolitions constitute collective punishment, which is prohibited and violates binding provisions of international law.***
- Demolition of homes along with unequal access to water, education, and building permits is a part of a range of official policies and practices putting pressure on Palestinians to leave their communities. ***This coercive environment puts numerous Palestinian communities at risk of forcible transfer, which constitutes a war crime.***

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