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SHARP INCREASE IN DEMOLITIONS AND DISPLACEMENT IN THE WEST BANK UPDATE JULY 2010

In recent weeks, around 550 people have lost their homes or sources of livelihood as a result of demolitions carried out by Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem and Area C. These recent developments represent a significant increase in demolitions and forced displacement in the West Bank, raising a number of serious humanitarian concerns.

Demolitions and displacement in 2010

According to OCHA's records, at least 230 Palestinian structures have been demolished in East Jerusalem and Area C in over 40 separate incidents since the beginning of this year. As a result, more than 1100 Palestinians, including over 400 children, have been forcibly displaced or otherwise affected owing to extensive damage of property or destruction of livelihood.

More than two thirds of this year's demolitions took place in July. During the month, Israeli authorities demolished over 140 Palestinian structures, including homes, tents, animal shelters, barracks, water cisterns, sanitation units, shops and other commercial enterprises. On 13 July, 7 Palestinian homes, 5 of them inhabited, were demolished in East Jerusalem, leaving 25 people, including 14 children - one of them only 2 months old - forcibly displaced. Similarly, nearly an entire Palestinian village, Al Farisiye in the Jordan Valley, was forcibly displaced on 19 July.

In addition, there has been a marked increase in the number of stop-work and demolition orders being issued by Israeli authorities in Area C in recent months. According to NGOs that provide legal aid to those affected, requests for legal assistance quadrupled in June and July.

Among those most at risk are communities that reside in areas designated by Israeli authorities as closed military or firing zones, which currently cover over 18% of the West Bank, in particular if located in close proximity to Israeli settlements.¹



Photo by OCHA

Beit Hanina, 13 July 2010.

Continuing negative trend

It is likely that this negative trend will continue in the coming weeks and months. In a recent submission to the Israeli High Court of Justice, the Civil Administration, which is the body that carries out demolitions in the West Bank, confirmed that it has received instructions from the Ministry of Defense to step up demolitions of Palestinian structures throughout Area C in the near future.²

According to the Israeli media an approval from several governmental bodies, including the Ministry of Interior and the office of the Prime Minister, is required to carry out demolitions in East Jerusalem.

The phenomenon of 'illegal' construction

Demolitions are mostly carried out against structures that are built without Israeli-issued building permits and are thus considered 'illegal' by Israeli authorities. In the course of the last 12 years, approximately 2,450 Palestinian-owned structures have been demolished in Area C on these grounds. As indicated in a series of recent reports, it is extremely difficult for Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem or Area C to obtain such permits, in fact leaving them no option but to build 'illegally' in order to repair, maintain or build homes and livelihood-related infrastructure.

In Area C, more than 70% of the land, currently allocated to Israeli settlements or the Israeli military, is unavailable for Palestinians, while severe restrictions apply to their use of additional 29%. Only 1% of the land in Area C is thus available for Palestinian construction and development. In East Jerusalem, only 13% of the land is currently zoned for Palestinian construction, compared to the 35% that are allocated for Israeli settlements.³

As the occupying power, Israel is obliged to administer the territory in a manner that benefits the local civilian population and ensures that their basic needs are met.⁴ Likewise, under international human rights law, Israel must ensure that persons under its jurisdiction enjoy fulfilment of their human rights, including the right to housing, health, education, and water.

Humanitarian concerns

The demolition of homes and sources of livelihood has devastating immediate and longer-term consequences for Palestinian families and communities, many of which already live below poverty levels and as such are among the most vulnerable people in the occupied Palestinian territory. In addition to depriving the family of its main asset and source of physical and

economic security, demolitions lead to a significant deterioration in living conditions, increased poverty and long-term instability, as well as limited access to basic services, such as education, health care and water and sanitation. The impact on children can be particularly devastating, including, for example, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and reduced academic achievement.

The current emergency response to demolitions and forced displacement

The humanitarian community in oPt responds to some of the most urgent needs arising as a result of demolitions and forced displacement. This includes, for example, the supply of tents, hygiene kits, food parcels, livelihood advice and assistance, psychosocial support and, in a limited number of cases, modest cash assistance. Such efforts are crucial and require sustained and dedicated funding.

However, such efforts cannot replace a demolished home or adequately address the longer-term needs of displaced families and communities. The forced displacement of the civilian population in East Jerusalem and Area C must be brought to a halt, and families and communities that have been displaced allowed to return to their homes and resume their livelihood.

Endnotes

1. Most of the communities resided in such areas prior to their designation as 'closed'. For further information see *Restricting Space: The Planning Regime Applied by Israel in Area C of the West Bank* (OCHA, 2009, available at www.ochaopt.org)
2. See "Civil Administration Told to Crack Down on Illegal Arab Structures" (*Ha'aretz*, 19 July 2010).
3. See *Restricting Space: The Planning Regime Applied by Israel in Area C of the West Bank* (OCHA, 2009); *The Planning Crisis in East Jerusalem: The Phenomenon*

of 'Illegal' Construction (OCHA, 2009); and *Area C Humanitarian Response Plan: Fact Sheet* (OCHA, August 2010), all available at www.ochaopt.org.

4. In addition, the law specifically prohibits a party to a conflict to order the displacement of the civilian population, in whole or in part, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand, and similarly prohibits the confiscation and/or destruction of private property.