



A Palestinian building is demolished by Israeli forces in Wadi Hummus, which sits on either side of the Israeli barrier just outside of Jerusalem in the West Bank July 22, 2019. (photo credit: REUTERS/MUSSA QAWASMA)

ISRAEL'S DEMOLITIONS OF PALESTINIAN HOMES CONTINUE UN- CHALLENGED

A number of Palestinian homes were demolished by hundreds of Israeli troops on 22nd July in Sur Baher, a village in the Wadi al-Hummus neighbourhood, East Jerusalem. The demolitions took place after last month's ruling of the Israeli Supreme Court that set for last Monday the deadline to knock down the houses. The demolitions were severely condemned by the international community that blamed Israel for not abiding by the rules of international law.¹

According to a tweet released by the official Palestine Liberation Organisation account, on July 21st at 9:12 pm (local time) the preparations for the operations start-

ed just past midnight 'as hundreds of armed Israeli occupying soldiers/ bulldozers stormed the town' and '[f]amilies threatened with demolitions were woken up/ moved out of their homes.'²

Nine buildings were demolished in total; some of them were still under construction and some of them were inhabited by families. As a result, 17 people -including children- are now to be added to the count of the displaced Palestinians.

The destruction of Palestinian homes by the Israeli occupation forces is an extremely common occurrence; however, this instance is peculiar.³

The village of Sur Baher straddles the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem. The neighbourhood of Wadi al- Hummus was physically cut off from the rest of the West Bank by the fence that Israel built in

2004-2005 but was never annexed to the territory of Jerusalem.

As a result, the municipality of Jerusalem cannot provide the area with the services and infrastructures required and neither can the Palestinian Authority as it does not have access to the neighbourhood. However, being the area part of the West Bank, the PA is allowed to issue building permits for the residents

The area of Wadi al-Hummus where the buildings were demolished is in actual facts defined as zone A and B -where the Palestinian Authority has planning

fact that a number of buildings were already present in that specific area at the time.

Moreover, the residents had not been properly informed of this unilateral imposed ban which is part of a policy that aims at 'forcing a Jewish demographic majority in [and around] the city'.⁴

The Palestinians fear that the ruling issued by Israel's Supreme Court and this instance might set a precedent for further demolitions to happen along the military fence and that they will go unpunished.

Residents of Wadi al-Hummus told local media that 16 residential buildings were targeted. AMMAR AWAD/REUTERS



and building jurisdiction - according to the Oslo Accords.

However, one month ago, Israel's Supreme Court ruled that those buildings violated a construction ban issued by the Israeli Military in 2011, despite the

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Israeli security forces tear down one of the Palestinian buildings still under construction. AHMAD GHARABLI/AFP

facts defined as zone A and B -where the Palestinian Authority has planning and building jurisdiction - according to the Oslo Accords.

Israel's international security minister, Gilad Erdan, responded to the recommendations of the EU in several tweets, stating that those buildings were illegal and mostly uninhabited and that they represented a security threat for Israeli military and civilians.⁵

The United Nations as well condemned the demolitions.

In a joint statement, Jamie McGoldrick, UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Gwyn Lewis, Director of West Bank Operations for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and James Heenan, Head of the UN Human Rights Office in the area con-

demn Israel's disregard for international law and humanitarian law.

The statement also reads that '[a]mong other things, the destruction of private property in occupied territory is only permissible where rendered absolutely necessary for military operations, which is not applicable.

Furthermore, it results in forced evictions, and contributes to the risk of forcible transfer facing many Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem'.

The statement also mentions that the

International Court of Justice had already ruled against the barrier itself, as it is deemed unnecessary for military purposes and therefore puts Israel in the position of a violator of humanitarian law.⁶

Mohammad Shtayyeh, Palestinian Prime Minister, said that the PA will bring the matter to the International Criminal Court (ICC), also stating that this perpetrates the forced displacement of Palestinians and constitutes a war crime and a

crime against humanity.⁷

The demolition of nine buildings is just the tip of the iceberg, it is the ultimate expression and physical translation of the multiple violations of human rights law, international law and humanitarian law that Israel perpetrates under the pretext of acting in the best interest of its citizens and for 'security reasons'.

ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/israeli-forces-pre-prepare-demolish-100-palestinian-homes-190722032443910.html>.
- 2 <https://twitter.com/nadplo>.
- 3 <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-israel-palestinians-jerusalem-demolit/israel-demolishes-palestinian-homes-near-west-bank-barrier-idUKKCNIUH07O>.
- 4 https://www.btselem.org/press_release/20190722_wadi_al_humos_demolitions.
- 5 https://twitter.com/giladerdan1?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor.
- 6 <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/un-officials-statement-demolitions-sur-bahir>.
- 7 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/israeli-forces-pre-prepare-demolish-100-palestinian-homes-190722032443910.html>.

The demolition of a Palestinian building by Israeli forces in the village of Sur Baher on July 22, 2019 [Ammar Awad/Reuters]