



# ICAHD

The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions  
הוועד הישראלי נגד הריסת בתים  
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## Overview of Israel's Demolition Policy

Since 1967 when the Occupation began in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, nearly 50,000 Palestinian homes and structures have been demolished – displacing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and affecting the livelihoods of thousands of others. Combine this with the 600 Palestinian villages that were demolished when the state of Israel was established ([www.zochrot.org](http://www.zochrot.org)) creating 750,000 Palestinian refugees (3/4 of the population), and its ongoing demolition policy within the state of Israel itself, the figure exceeds more than 100,000 Palestinian homes demolished since 1948. This is a conservative figure because multiple level homes and apartment blocks count as one unit and it does not include the number of self-demolitions which is a growing phenomenon done because Israel issues a bill for the demolitions which many Palestinians cannot afford to pay.

### Why are homes demolished?

According to Israeli authorities, Palestinian homes are demolished for various and sundry reasons: the land they own has been declared by Israel “agricultural land” or “open green space;” they have no building permit (which Israeli authorities rarely grant to Palestinians); the slope of their land is adjudged as “too steep;” their houses are too near settlements or Israeli-only highways (although the houses were there first); out of collective punishment for some action the punished people had nothing to do with; the “clearing” of vast tracts of land for military/security purposes; destruction for the sake of expanding roads, settlements and the “Separation Barrier;” houses “cleared” to make passage safe for settlers or for other security purposes; homes representing “collateral damage;” and more.

### Types of demolitions

The policy of house demolitions uses administration, planning, zoning and the law for overt political purposes: to quietly transfer Palestinians out of the country or, alternatively, to confine them to small enclaves, thereby leaving the land (their land) free for Israeli settlement and annexation. Most people think that Palestinians houses are demolished because their inhabitants performed some terrorist acts. This is not true. In 99% of the cases the residents had absolutely nothing to do with security offenses: they neither committed illegal acts nor were even accused of doing so. (It should be noted, however, that demolishing homes belonging to families of terrorists is a form of collective punishment against innocent people that itself constitutes a war crime.)

The actual demolition of homes is only part of the story. We must also consider the tens of thousands of Palestinian families who own land and possess the financial resources to build modest homes who do not do so because they cannot obtain permits and do not want to risk demolition. In the Palestinian sector of East Jerusalem alone there are 25,000 “missing” housing units – a completely artificial and induced housing shortage that condemns thousands of families to crowded and inadequate living conditions. Again, this is part of what Israel calls “the quiet transfer,” making life so difficult for the Palestinians that they will leave the country altogether.

The vacuum created by halting Palestinian construction is filled by Israel itself. Amidst the demolitions, housing units have been built for over 700,000 Israeli Jews living in the Occupied Palestine Territory in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

There are different categories of home demolitions in the Occupied Territory:

- 1. Punitive demolitions:** Houses demolished as punishment for the actions of people associated with the houses. During the second Intifada (September 2000 - February 2005), Israel punitively demolished 664 Palestinian houses. This policy was suspended by the Israeli army in February 2005 after it reached the conclusion that rather than deterring attacks, punitive demolitions only enflame the people and lead to more attacks. The practice was resumed on 19 January 2009 however between then and October 2015, there were few punitive demolitions. In October 2015 a fresh wave of violence broke out in what has become known as the “knife” intifada, with more than 200 Israelis stabbed and more than 200 Palestinians killed. Punitive demolitions continue to happen from time to time, including during 2017. Punitive demolitions account for only 1% of all defined demolitions. Note that this practice has also been criticized as it only applies to Palestinians because family homes of Jewish Israelis who have attacked and killed Palestinians remain untouched.
- 2. Administrative demolitions:** Houses demolished for lack of a building permit. This happens in Area C of the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. To understand what is meant by Area C, refer to the Oslo Accords and the lengthy peace process from 1991 – 2000 that was sponsored by the US. Under it the Palestinian Authority (PA) was created to have limited self-governance over parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The most important issues it was to address included the borders of Israel and Palestine, the Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem, the question of Israel's military presence in and control over the remaining territories after the recognition of the Palestinian autonomy by Israel, and the Palestinian right of return. The Oslo Accords have been a complete failure because Israel has not acted in good faith so that a viable Palestinian state on the 22% of historic Palestine could be established.

However, it was under Oslo that the West Bank was divided into three areas. This was to be a temporary arrangement towards the incremental transfer of power to the Palestinians. Area A comprises 18% of the West Bank and is under full Palestinian control. It includes the eight major Palestinian cities of Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem, Qalkilia, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jericho and 80% of Hebron. Area B is 20% of the West Bank and is where Palestinians have civil control and Israel has security control. The remaining 62% is Area C where there is full Israeli civil and security control.

Around 300,000 Palestinians live in Area C however Israel has moved in more than 400,000 of its Jewish population who live in 150 settlements and 97 outposts. Palestinians have absolutely no involvement in land management in East Jerusalem or Area C. Therefore, it is important to point out that in almost all cases, Palestinians have no choice but to build "illegally" as permits will not be granted. It is also the case that in Area B, if a house is near a military base or a road used by the military or settlers, it may also face administrative demolition. This type of demolition accounts for approximately 20% of defined demolitions.

- 3. Land-clearing operations/Military demolitions:** Houses demolished by the IDF during military operations for the purposes of clearing off a piece of land (for whatever reason), achieve a military goal or to kill wanted persons as part of Israel's policy of extrajudicial executions. Military demolition account for about 61% of defined demolitions. The 18,000 Palestinian homes that were demolished or severely damaged in Gaza in the summer of 2014 during Israel's Operation Protective Edge come into this category. More than 100,000 Palestinians were left homeless. According to the UN's Office of Coordination Affairs, as of November 2017, Twenty percent of them still do not have homes of their own and most them continue to live with relatives.
- 4. Undefined demolitions:** ICAHD is collecting information and investigating the status of many demolitions carried out between 1967-1982. Preliminary results indicate these will include demolitions from all categories but with the majority being land-clearing operations/military and punitive.

Today tens of thousands of Palestinians hold demolition orders in their hands and live in fear, wondering when the bulldozers will arrive to demolish their home.

## **Why is this cruel policy of house demolitions allowed to continue?**

The wholesale destruction of entire villages, towns, urban neighbourhoods and their infrastructures has fundamentally damaged the very fabric of Palestinian society. Israel has succeeded in confining Palestinians to crowded and disconnected enclaves. Israel has prevented a viable Palestinian state being created and it has ensured that Israel has permanent control of the Occupied Territory. It is this ongoing process of ethnic cleansing and displacement – judaisation (an Israeli term) – that continues today on *both sides* of the “Green Line.”

Today it is obvious that the two-state solution is exceptionally difficult to achieve, buried under settlements and settlement blocs, a massive network of highways that incorporates the West Bank irreversibly into Israel, the Separation Barrier and a vast matrix of military bases. So much Palestinian land has been lost, so fragmented has the Palestinian territory become, that no coherent and contiguous territory exists. East Jerusalem, where the Palestinian capital would have been, is gone, its urban space reduced to tiny Palestinian enclaves amidst massive settlements, the entire Palestinian sector annexed to Israel decades before.

At present, only one government effectively rules the entire country: Israel's. Only one army controls it: the IDF. There is but one official currency (the Israeli shekel), one water and electrical system, one highway system, etc. etc.

Israel believes that it has won: the Zionist dream of conquering the entire Land of Israel has been accomplished. It has been successful in ‘demolishing Palestine’.

## **The message of the bulldozers: Get out you do not belong here**

Israel's policy of house demolitions plays a key role in maintaining the Occupation by confining the Palestinians to small islands, or driving them from the country altogether. The house demolition policy did not originate with the Occupation in 1967. The British Mandate authorities demolished Palestinian homes before 1948 as forms of “deterrence” against attacks, appreciative of the fact that this was the most painful punishment for Arabs (and, probably, for anyone). It was Israel, however, that applied the house demolition policy widely and systematically. House demolitions have stood at the center of Israel's approach to “the Arab problem” since the state's conception. The house demolition policy goes far beyond mere administrative and military means to contain or force out an entire population. In the aggregate, from 1948 till the present, it represents a policy of displacement, of one people dispossessing another, taking both their lands and their right to self-determination. Since people cannot survive or function without a house, the Message of the Bulldozers is clear: “Get out. You do not belong here. We uprooted you from your homes in 1948 and prevented your return, and now we will uproot you from all of the Land of Israel.”

Over the years, ICAHD resisted demolitions of all kinds. As Israelis they were able to block bulldozers coming to demolish. They chained themselves in the houses, conducted campaigns to mobilize opposition to the policy in Israel and abroad, and turned to the courts. When demolitions finally occurred, ICAHD rebuilt demolished homes with the Palestinians. One hundred and eighty-nine homes were rebuilt as political acts of solidarity and resistance. ICAHD believes that house demolitions are the very essence of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians: Israel's exclusive claim to the entire country in the name of the Jewish people at the expense of another people living in the country, a people being dispossessed by our own country. This is what gives the policy of house demolitions its special significance. When, as Israelis, ICAHD supporters resist home demolitions and rebuild demolished homes as acts of civil disobedience, they are acknowledging the rights of both people to share the country. ICAHD affirms the recognition that Palestinian claims carry equal authority to their own. ICAHD proclaims loudly: We refuse to be enemies.

## **What is the process of demolition?**

The motivation for demolishing Palestinian homes is purely political, although it employs an elaborate system of planning, laws and administrative procedures to lend it a proper facade.

The goal is to confine the 3.9 million Palestinians of the Occupied Territory, together with the 1.8 million Palestinian citizens of Israel, to small enclaves on only about 8% of the country – rising to 15% if a truncated Palestinian mini-state is established. In this way, Israel can effectively control the entire country, Palestinian state or not.

When homes are demolished in military actions or as acts of deterrence and collective punishment, there is no process. No formal demolition orders, no warning, no time to remove furniture or personal belongings, often barely time to escape the home falling around your ears. This can happen to your home, or to the home of a neighbor whom the Israeli authorities have targeted. Nuha Maqqdmeh Sweidan, a Gazan mother of 10 and nine months pregnant, was killed when the house next to hers was dynamited by Israeli troops. “We were in bed, the children were asleep,” her husband related to Amnesty. “There was an explosion and walls collapsed on top of us. I pulled myself from under the rubble....I started to dig in the rubble with my hands. First, I found my two little boys and my three-year-old girl.... One by one we found the other children, but my wife remained trapped under the rubble with our youngest daughter, who is two. She was holding her when the wall fell on her....” Writes Amnesty in its report *Under the Rubble* (2004:3):

The Israeli authorities claim that these demolitions are not intended as punishment, but rather to “deter” Palestinians from getting involved in attacks. Israel has never destroyed the homes of Israeli Jews who committed serious attacks, such as the murderer of Prime Minister Rabin, or bomb attacks against Palestinians or Israeli Arabs. These punitive forced evictions and house demolitions are a flagrant form of collective punishment and violate a fundamental principle of international law, which stipulates that collective punishment is never permissible under any circumstances.

On August 6, 2002, the Israeli High Court of Justice gave its consent to demolishing houses of families of people accused of terrorism without warning or a chance to appeal to the court. From that time until the Ministry of Defense itself, in early 2005, ended its policy of punitive demolitions, 620 homes were demolished without recourse to the Israeli legal system.

Demolitions are executed for “administrative” reasons (lack of a permit) by the Civil Administration in the West Bank and Gaza, by either the Ministry of Interior or the Jerusalem municipality in East Jerusalem. Regardless, the overall process is similar. Master plans and zoning regulations have been carefully prepared to limit Palestinian building, all carefully based on legal requirements. The entire West Bank has been designated “agricultural land,” while most of the unbuilt-upon land owned by Palestinians in East Jerusalem has been zoned as “open green space.” In both cases it is therefore possible to deny building permits to Palestinians on supposedly professional planning grounds and, if they nevertheless build on their own land (everyone must live *somewhere*), to demolish their “illegal” homes without appearing to discriminate. (While Jews may in rare cases receive a demolition order for an illegal porch or shed, there has never been a Jewish house demolished in either Jerusalem or the Occupied Territories, the removal of a few temporary trailers set up by settlers on remote hillsides excepted.) And the policy is explicit: “Our policy is not to approve building in Area C,” an Israeli Army spokesperson said openly to Amnesty International delegates in 1999. “There are no more construction permits for Palestinians,” reiterated Colonel Shlomo Politus, legal advisor to the Civil Administration, to the Israeli Parliament on 13 July 2003 (Amnesty 2004:4).

Since Palestinians do not have home mail delivery (including in East Jerusalem), demolition orders are distributed in a very haphazard manner. Occasionally a building inspector may knock on the door and hand the order to anyone who answers, including small children. More frequently the order is stuck into the doorframe or even left under a stone near the house. On many occasions Palestinians have complained that they never received the order before the bulldozers arrived, and thus were denied recourse to the courts. In Jerusalem a favored practice is to “deliver” an order at night by placing it somewhere near the targeted home, then arriving early in the morning to demolish. ICAHD has a case pending against David Schneider, the chief building inspector of the Ministry of Interior, who makes it a practice to keep lawyers or families who have obtained a last-minute injunction from the court from approaching him until the demolition has been completed.

If they do manage to reach the court in time, Palestinians may occasionally delay the order's execution (at considerable expense). ICAHD is not aware, however, of any order that has ever been overturned. Once it is affirmed, the bulldozers may arrive at any time – the same day, weeks or years later, or never. Palestinians, barred from any possibility of obtaining decent, affordable and legal housing, do a simple, cold arithmetic: thousands of demolition orders are outstanding, the various Israeli authorities destroy “only” 300-500 homes a year (military attacks and punitive demolitions aside), so if I build the chances are that I might buy a year or two or three before the bulldozers arrive. As in a perverse reverse lottery, I might even “win” and escape demolition altogether.

This gamble comes at a high emotional cost as well as financial. Imagine the anxiety families endure during the weeks, month and years of waiting for bulldozers to arrive. “My morning routine,” says Neimah Dandis, whose home in Anata was finally demolished in November 2004 after a wait of eight years, “consisted of getting out of bed, going to the window to see if the bulldozers were approaching, then going to the bathroom.” Whether the home is demolished or not, the psychological tensions often lead to stress-related health problems, domestic violence and trauma, all aggravated by poor living conditions and financial strain. Men who fear for the safety of their homes and their families often quit their day jobs to be present if the bulldozers come. The Israeli authorities know all this and even incorporate it into the “planning” process. ICAHD members have been told explicitly by legal officials in the Civil Administration that fear and intimidation are effective in deterring Palestinians from building.

When the dreaded day finally arrives, it does so almost without warning. Though families know their homes are targeted, actual demolitions are carried out at random, without pattern, and can strike anywhere at any time. (Normally demolitions do not occur on Fridays or Saturdays due to the Jewish Sabbath, or on Jewish holidays. These are the only times Palestinians can truly relax – an ironic twist on the idea of the “Day of Rest.”) Randomization is part of the generalized fear that underlies the policy of “deterrence.” The wrecking crews, accompanied by tens of soldiers, police and Civil Administration officials, usually come in the early morning hours just after the men have left for work. The family is sometimes given a few minutes to remove their belongings before the bulldozers move in, but because family members and neighbors usually put up some kind of resistance – or at least protest – they are often removed forcibly from the house. Their possessions are then thrown out by the wrecking crews (often foreign guest workers). Amnesty's report *Under the Rubble* (2004:4) relates the story of As'ad Mu'yin and his cousin Ziad:

On 21 August 2003, on the morning of his wedding, As'ad Mu'yin had his house demolished; the house of his cousin Ziad As'ad, who had married a week earlier, was demolished at the same time. The two adjacent houses were in the West Bank town of Nazla 'Issa. As'ad Mu'yin had been living on the ground floor of the house with his parents and three brothers and had furnished and prepared the second floor to move in with his wife. The house was demolished before he could do so. The new furniture and the wedding gifts disappeared under the rubble, along with the content of the family home on the ground floor. He told Amnesty International: *“The army came early in the morning, at about 7am. I was getting ready for the wedding, for a very happy day. They had bulldozers ...they gave us 15 minutes to leave the house. We had no time to salvage anything. They said that we did not have building permits.... But everyone knows that Israel does not give building permits to Palestinians in Area C.”*

In addition to the emotional suffering of seeing their most personal possessions broken, ruined and thrown out in the rain, sun and dirt, demolitions constitute a serious financial blow, especially to the poor families who make up the clear majority of demolition victims. About 70% of Palestinians living in both Jerusalem and the West Bank/Gaza live below the poverty line. Families whose monthly income is around \$500 are burdened by the Israeli courts with hefty fines in the range of \$10-20,000, to be paid in monthly installments whether the house is demolished or not. In Jerusalem families must also pay for the demolition of their own homes; at the end of the demolition they are presented with the wrecking company's bill, which is anywhere from \$5000 - \$20,000, depending upon the size of the building.

When the bulldozer finally begins its systematic work of demolition, the whole process takes between fifteen minutes (for a small home of concrete blocks) to six hours (for a five-story apartment building). At times demolition is resisted amidst violence; people are beaten, jailed, sometimes killed – and always humiliated. At other times the family and their neighbors watch sullenly as their home is reduced to rubble. One can only imagine their feelings and thoughts.

### House Demolitions in Jerusalem

A key “front” in the struggle to contain or expel Palestinians is Jerusalem, and especially “East” Jerusalem where some 300,000 Palestinians reside. Although Israel insists that the city is now “united,” deriving its legitimacy from its history as Israel's capital, “East” Jerusalem is in fact a fiction. During Jordanian rule (1948-1967), the Arab city of Jerusalem consisted of only six square kilometers – the Old City and its immediate surroundings. To this, Israel added another 64 square kilometers of West Bank land, gerrymandered to include as much unbuilt upon land as possible for future Israeli settlements while excluding large Palestinian populations, calling the whole “united Jerusalem.” Since that time all urban policy has been directed towards maintaining an artificial 72%-28% majority of Jews over Arabs, the proportion that existed when the two sides of the city were unilaterally “united” in 1967. A complex system involving the partisan use of planning and zoning mechanisms, of land expropriation and house demolitions, of bureaucratic means of revoking Jerusalem residency has been developed to ensure the “Jewish character” of the city. In Jerusalem, explains Amir Cheshin, the long-serving Advisor on Arab Affairs for the Jerusalem Municipality under Kollek and, for a time, under Olmert,

Israel turned urban planning into a tool of the government, to be used to help prevent the expansion of the city's non-Jewish population. It was a ruthless policy, if only for the fact that the needs (to say nothing of the rights) of Palestinian residents were ignored. Israel saw the adoption of strict zoning plans as a way of limiting the number of new homes built in Arab neighborhoods, and thereby ensuring that the Arab percentage of the city's population - 28.8% in 1967 - did not grow beyond this level. Allowing “too many” new homes in Arab neighborhoods would mean “too many” Arab residents in the city. The idea was to move as many Jews as possible into east Jerusalem, and move as many Arabs as possible out of the city entirely. Israeli housing policy in east Jerusalem was all about this numbers game (Cheshin *et al.* 1999:10, 31-32).

Palestinian residents of “East” Jerusalem are confined to highly circumscribed parts of “East” Jerusalem. Since 1967, 35% of the Arab-owned land of “East” Jerusalem has been expropriated for Israeli settlements, roads and other facilities, while another 54% of Palestinian-owned land, designated as “open green space” reserved for “public purposes,” is forbidden for Palestinian construction). Cheshin writes:

Planners with the city engineer's office, when drawing the zoning boundaries for the Arab neighborhoods, limited them to already built-up areas. Adjoining open areas were either zoned “green,” to signify they were off-limits to development, or left unzoned until they were needed for the construction of Jewish housing projects. The 1970 Kollek plan contains the principles upon which Israeli housing policy is based to this day - expropriation of Arab-owned land, development of large Jewish neighborhoods in east Jerusalem, and limitations on development in Arab neighborhoods (Cheshin 1999:37).

That leaves only 11% of East Jerusalem available for Palestinian housing and communal needs, only 7% of the city's total urban space.

This set the stage for what in Israel is known as the “Quiet Transfer.” The goal is to confine Palestinians to small enclaves of “East” Jerusalem, to remove them from the city altogether, and ultimately to induce their emigration from the country. The system works like this:

- Since Palestinian residents of Jerusalem cannot acquire permits to build on the 89% of “East” Jerusalem that they own, some 25,000 housing units are currently lacking in the Palestinian sector. Since the Palestinians own land and have the resources to build at least modest homes, the shortage is artificial and induced, a way to force Palestinians out of the city.
- The scarce stock of housing in “East” Jerusalem thereby raises the price of buying or renting to unaffordable levels. 70% of the Palestinian residents of “East” Jerusalem live below the poverty line. To secure affordable housing, they must cross the city's boundaries to less expensive accommodations found in the West Bank – in Palestinian areas that were cut out of the municipal borders in 1967.
- Unlike Jewish residents of the city, Palestinians wishing to retain their Jerusalem residency must continually prove to the Israeli Ministry of Interior that Jerusalem remains their “center of life.” Moving to affordable housing just beyond the municipal border invalidates that status, leading the Interior Ministry to revoke the Jerusalem residency of those “emigrants.” It is estimated that since 1967 about 6000 Jerusalem ID cards have been confiscated, forcing some 25,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites into exile or illegal residency in their own homes. Thousands of other Palestinian Jerusalemites cannot obtain permission for their spouses coming from other places to reside in the city.

According to B’Tselem (1998), Israel’s policy in East Jerusalem works as follows:

The Jerusalem Municipality expropriates land, prevents preparation of a town planning scheme for Palestinian neighborhoods, and refuses to grant building permits, CAUSING a severe housing shortage, FORCING residents to build without a permit, AFTER WHICH the Ministry of Interior and the Municipality demolish the houses, SO the residents move into homes outside the city, AND THEN the Ministry of Interior revokes their residency and banishes them from the city forever.

- Refusal to issue building permits confines Palestinians to small patches of “East” Jerusalem. To give “teeth” to its hostile zoning practices, the Jerusalem Municipality, together with the Ministry of Interior, demolishes “illegal” Palestinian houses. (Except for an occasional porch or other minor addition, Jewish-Israeli homes are never demolished, although 80% of the building violations take place on the western side of the city.) Thus, despite an induced shortage of 25,000 units, the Municipality grants few permits a year for Arab housing and demolishes at least 100 homes a year. Some 20,000 demolition orders are outstanding.
- Because of the protests the house demolition policy arouses in Israel and abroad, the authorities cannot demolish the thousands of houses they would like to. They have therefore adopted a policy of “randomization.” To diffuse the fear of demolition and deter Palestinians from building altogether, houses are demolished throughout “East” Jerusalem in a completely unpredictable way. Thus, someone receiving a demolition order might have his or her home destroyed immediately, while a neighbor might live for a year, or five, or forever, in a home that received a demolition order long before.
- Permits, even when possible to acquire, are far too expensive for the average Palestinian resident. Because Jews do not own land privately in Israel, all construction is based on commercial considerations. Thus, the government will release a certain amount of “state land” for a new neighborhood, and contractors bid on rights to build hundreds of apartment units. Costs involved in acquiring permits, often reaching \$50,000 - \$60,000 (fees, surveys, engineering plans, connection to infrastructure), are simply built into the price of the many units. In places where the government wishes to encourage construction (the large settlements in East Jerusalem), fees are often waived entirely and building costs are subsidized to make the housing units affordable. None of this exists in the Palestinian sector, where most building is done for private family needs. Palestinians must not only assume the astronomical costs of securing the permit and connecting to the infrastructure, but their costs are often higher, since their residences are far from the Israeli infrastructure,

making connection to sewage, electricity, water and telephone lines prohibitive.

- Even securing a building permit does not guarantee adequate housing, however. While Israeli contractors can build hundreds of percent the size of the property (that is, two to six or more stories), Palestinian building is confined to just 25% of their land. Jewish-Israelis, then, can acquire roomy apartments in medium- or high-rise buildings, or are able to purchase spacious “villas,” (some of them, ironically, marketed as “Arab-style” housing), while Palestinians with large families are forced to live in small single-story houses. Additional rooms added as the family grows – or because of the inability of married sons to obtain building permits for their own families – are often demolished. Palestinians thus suffer from overcrowded conditions: 2.2 persons per room on the average for Arabs; 0.8 person per room in the Jewish sector.
- Although Palestinians are confined to 7% of the city's urban area in inadequate housing, Jewish-Israelis have access to spacious accommodation on both the eastern and western sides of the city. Between 1967-2003, some 90,000 housing units were built in East Jerusalem for Jews, almost all with government subsidies. None were built for Palestinians with public financing. New settlements arise regularly, on confiscated Palestinian land: for the Har Homa project separating Jerusalem from Bethlehem; for expansion of existing settlements; for 17 new settlements to be established around the Old City (in Silwan, now named by the Israelis “the City of David;” in Sheikh Jarrah; in Ras el-Amud, in Kidmat Tzion (the “front-line of Zion) in Abu Dis, in “Nof Zahav” in Jabal Mukaber, among others); and in the Old City itself, where Ateret Cohanim, a religious-messianic-settler organization seeking to expel the Muslim population from the Old City altogether, has been given license and resources to carry out its program.
- Discrimination against Palestinians exists also in the provision of municipal services. The Palestinian population pays 40% of the city's budget but receives only 8-11% of the municipality's budget. Much of East Jerusalem is lacking such basic services as sewage systems, roads, parks, lighting, post offices, schools and community services.
- The “neighborhoods” built on “East” Jerusalem serve to isolate Palestinian populations in small and disconnected enclaves, and to prevent the development and expansion of the Palestinian side of the city. Together with a new system of Israeli “ring roads” and the creation of a “Greater” Jerusalem enveloped by a wall, Jerusalem is being transformed from a city into a region dominating the entire central portion of the West Bank.

### **What Does It Mean to a Palestinian Family to Have Its Home Demolished?**

“The demolition of a home is the demolition of a family,” so said Salim Shawamreh after experiencing his home being demolished.

The human suffering entailed in the process of destroying a family's home is incalculable. A home is not only a physical structure; it is the center of our lives, the site of our most intimate personal life, an expression of our identity, tastes and social status. It is a refuge, a physical representation of the family, an extension of our very selves. It is “home.” For Palestinians, homes carry additional meanings. Upon marriage, sons construct their homes close to that of their parents, thus maintaining not only a physical closeness but continuity on one's ancestral land. The latter aspect is especially important in the world of farmers, and even more so as Palestinians have faced massive displacement in the past half century. Land expropriation is another facet of home demolition, an attack on one's very being and identity.

Demolition is an experience different for men, women and children. Men are probably the most humiliated, since demolition means you can neither protect your family nor provide for their basic shelter and needs. It also means losing a living connection to your family land, your personal patrimony and that of your people. Men often cry at demolitions (and long after), but they are also angered, swear revenge and intend to build again (although some men withdraw emasculated from active family life). Since men usually have jobs and access to the world outside the home, they also have a certain outlet for their frustrations.



Demolitions alter, even destroy, a woman's entire *persona* and role in the family. Palestinian women generally do not have careers outside the home. Their identity as an individual and status as wives and mothers is wrapped up in their domestic life. When their homes are demolished, women often become disoriented, unable to function without that organizing domestic sphere. Some sink into a kind of mourning, although in some cases, especially if the husband has withdrawn, they take on more assertive roles in the family. Demolition represents a double tragedy for women. Not only do they lose their own domestic space, but they are forced to move into the homes of other women, their mothers- or sisters-in-law. The overcrowding and tension this generates is exacerbated by the fact that the "guest" woman has little control over the domestic sphere, over the care of her own husband and children, further diminishing her role and status. In many cases this results in severe tensions within the families, including domestic violence spawned by the wife's demands (even unspoken) for a home of her own, and the husband's inability to provide it. Eventually families may move into their own rented quarters – another expense – or even rebuild their home, having no choice but to risk another demolition. Whatever the case, for many women a demolished home, like a loved one, can never be replaced, and the wound never heals.

For children, the act of demolition – and the months and years leading up to it – is a time of trauma. To witness the fear and powerlessness of your parents, to feel constantly afraid and insecure, to see loved ones (relatives and neighbors) being beaten and losing their homes, to experience the harassment of Civil Administration field supervisors speeding around your village in their white Toyota jeeps—and then to endure the noise, violence, displacement and destruction of your home, your world, your toys—these mark children for life. Psychological services are largely absent for most Palestinian communities and there are many signs of trauma and stress among children: bed-wetting, nightmares, fear to leave home to not "abandon" parents and siblings to the army, dramatic drops in grades and school-leaving, as well the effects of exposure to domestic violence that occasionally follows impoverishment, displacement and humiliation. In the words of Salim Shawamreh, a resident of the village of Anata whose home has been demolished six times: "The demolition of a home is the demolition of a family." According to the research of the late Eyad Serraj, a Palestinian psychologist who founded the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, a strong correlation exists between young people who become suicide bombers and those who have had their homes demolished.

Why, then, do Palestinian families decide to build without a permit? First, many of those facing demolition began building during the initial phase of the Oslo process when thousands of Palestinians, encouraged by the prospects of peace, returned to their home towns and villages and built homes, or when local people, suffering severe housing shortages since 1967, felt that demolitions would cease. Indeed, Israeli leaders encouraged this kind of thinking (Prime Minister Peres announced a freeze on demolitions towards the end of his term). Palestinians report that the Civil Administration, too, led them to believe that since most of the land was going to be handed back anyway, they would face no demolition problems—even if the process had not formally changed. This attitude is reflected in the wording of Article 27(2) ("Planning and Zoning") of the 1995 Interim Agreement (Oslo II): "In Area C, powers and responsibilities related to the sphere of Planning and Zoning will be transferred gradually to Palestinian jurisdiction that will cover West Bank and Gaza Strip territory, except for the issues that will be negotiated in the permanent status negotiations." After Netanyahu's election in 1996 (and thereafter), the rules of the game suddenly changed, and many Palestinians found themselves victims of the "peace process" and of bad faith.

Despite repeated inquiries to the various authorities, it is impossible to obtain accurate figures as to how many permits are granted, what percentage of applicants are turned down, how many families even apply. The Civil Administration claims it has granted 3000 permits retroactively; a reliable source tells us that only two or three building permits a year are issued in the entire Hebron area, comprising a third of the West Bank.

While every country has planning regulations, zoning and enforcement mechanisms, Israel is the only Western country that systematically denies permits and demolishes houses of a particular national group. Similarly, Jerusalem is the only city that systematically denies

permits and demolishes houses of a particular national group. These actions, reminiscent of apartheid-era South Africa and the Serbs in Kosovo, other cases in which the homes of a particular ethnic group were destroyed for clearly racist or nationalistic reasons, violate the fundamental human rights of the Palestinian people. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing” (Article 25.1). The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights “recognize[s] the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living...including adequate food, clothing, and housing” (Article 11.1). The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination obligates state parties “to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, color, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law..., in particular the right to housing” (Article 5). Moreover, the Fourth Geneva Convention requires occupying powers such as Israel to protect the well-being of civilian populations under their control. Under The Hague Regulations of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, for example, Israel is enjoined as an occupying power to protect and ensure the needs of the Palestinian population. Human rights organizations agree that Israel’s policy of house demolition constitutes a war crime.

Given the massive scale and prolonged time period that the house demolition policy has characterized Israel's relationship with the Palestinians on both sides of the “Green Line,” the bulldozer certainly deserves to take its rightful place alongside the tank. The Israeli public knows almost nothing about the cruel and Kafkaesque system the Palestinians live under. Uri Savir, the Director-General of the Foreign Ministry under Rabin and Peres, “discovered” this reality only after the Oslo process was well underway. He writes:

The negotiations [with the Palestinians at Oslo, in 1995] over the powers Israel has exercised over a whole generation, opened an entire world before me. Over the years Israelis has cultivated a self-serving myth that ours was an ‘enlightened occupation.’ I knew this was a contradiction in terms, but I did not know -- and I think few other Israelis did – how thoroughly we had invaded the lives of our Palestinian neighbors. We repressed this knowledge as we may have been the first conquerors in history who felt themselves conquered. Our self-image as a humane society and history’s eternal victim, as well as Arab antagonism, blinded us to what was going on in the territories. What I discovered [in Oslo] was that a Palestinian could not built, work, study, purchase land, grow produce, start a business, take a walk at night, enter Israel, go abroad, or visit his family in Gaza or Jordan without a permit from us. The apparatus for managing this octopus was huge.

Some of these restrictions stemmed from legitimate security concerns. But many were the products of inertia and a burgeoning bureaucratic monster with a bottomless budget to feed on. During the twenty-eight years of occupation [until 1995], about a third of the Palestinian population in the territories had, at one time or another, been detained or imprisoned by Israel. And the whole of the population had, at some time, been grossly humiliated by us...

The personification of the occupation, according to many Palestinians, was an officer in the Civil Administration named Moskovitch. If Moskovitch approved, you could build. If Moskovitch didn’t approve, you could not, and until Moskovitch approved you could tear your hair out. Moskovitch had become an institution in himself. When I finally met him – a thin, religiously-observant, amiable man – he in no way impressed me as tyrannical. ‘Moskovitch is a good man,’ one of his superior officers told me. And this was just the problem – a good man carrying out the orders of an unfeeling bureaucracy makes an impossible situation, for there is no way under such conditions for goodwill or common sense to function.” (Savir 1999:207-208).

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