



House demolitions: the effects on Palestinian Women

Since 1967, Israel has demolished over 18,000 Palestinian homes — leaving over 100,000 people without shelter. Meanwhile, thousands more live in constant fear of forced eviction.

**Empowering women,
advocating for justice,
sustainable peace,
and an end
to occupation.**

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Jerusalem Center for Women Fact sheet (October 2008)



The Illegal Justifications for Demolitions

The policy of house demolitions uses administration, planning, zoning and the law for overt political purposes: to quietly transfer Palestinians from the land, or to confine them to small enclaves, thereby leaving the land free for the construction and development of Israeli settlements and annexation. The justification for house demolitions is commonly on the grounds that the house is either unlicensed, or it is necessary for security purposes.

Unlicensed houses: The destruction of Palestinian houses in Israel and in parts of the West Bank is often carried out on the ground that they were built without a permit. Hundreds of homes have been demolished in Palestinian areas in Israel in the past few years alone, whereas such demolitions in the Jewish sector are an extremely rare occurrence, if they occur at all. Within the West Bank it is invariably Palestinian homes and other properties which are destroyed while Israeli settlements, which are illegal under international law, continue to be expanded. The main reasons why many houses are built without a permit in the Arab sector in Israel and in parts of the Occupied Territories, including in East Jerusalem, is the fact that it is very difficult and often impossible for Israeli Arabs and Palestinians to obtain building permits.

Military/security: In approximately 95% of cases where homes are demolished, the families did not commit any terrorist offences against Israel, nor did they commit any illegal acts. However, the vast majority of the homes, land and other properties destroyed by the Israeli army in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in recent years fall under this category, which Israel defines as destruction for “military/security needs”. The scale of the destruction in this category is massive, and is not limited to the destruction of homes but also to large areas of cultivated land, hundreds of commercial properties (shops, workshops and factories) and public buildings.

Demolition Procedures

While the motive is purely political, the Israeli policy of demolishing Palestinian homes utilizes an elaborate system of planning, laws and administrative procedures to maintain an illegitimate façade. When homes are demolished—often at night - there is no formal process, no formal demolition orders, no warnings, and no time to remove personal belongings. Families hardly have enough time to escape before their homes become rubble.

Effects on Women

House demolitions can have a devastating impact on women. In rural areas, it is especially common for women to not have careers outside the home. For them, the home is the center of their life, family and where they invest much of their time advancing their talents and hobbies and looking after the family. Personal identity and status as women, wives and mothers is heavily linked to the home.

- House demolitions have long term consequences such as limiting or disrupting women's access to education, social services, medical services, support systems and economic resources.
- Not only do they lose their own domestic space, but they are forced to move into the homes of other women, their mothers – sisters, or sisters in law. Such overcrowding generates tension and is exacerbated by the fact that the guest' woman has little or no control over the domestic sphere she now occupies, over the care of her children and husband. This further diminishes her role and status. This can result in severe tensions within families, and in some cases instances of domestic violence.
- When their homes are demolished, women often become disorientated, unable to function without their routine of organizing and managing the domestic sphere. It is common that some sink in to a kind of mourning, and severe depression. In some cases where the husband has become withdrawn, the traditional gender roles are reversed and the woman assumes the assertive role in the family.
- Demolitions increase women's direct experience of violence, and particularly affect those most at risk such as younger and older women, displaced and refugee women, women from low socio-economic situation, unemployed women, expectant mothers and those who are gravely ill and in need of immediate access to medical care.

The human suffering caused by destroying a family's home is incalculable. A home is not just a physical structure; it is the site of our personal life, a symbol and expression of our identity.

Israel's Obligations under International Law

The destruction of Palestinian homes, agricultural land and other property in the Occupied Territories, including East Jerusalem, is inextricably linked with Israel's long-standing policy of appropriating as much as possible of the land it occupies, notably by establishing Israeli settlements. House demolitions are considered a war crime under the Geneva Conventions of the 1949. In addition, the UN Security Council on 19 May 2004 adopted resolution 1544, which reiterates the obligation of Israel as an occupying power, to abide by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention that addresses the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and other resolutions on the Palestinian questions. Israel has repeatedly failed to abide by its obligations under the international human rights convention such as the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and more.

These punitive forced evictions and house demolitions are a form of collective punishment and violate a fundamental principle of international law—that collective punishment is never permissible under any circumstances.

As well as violating international humanitarian law *per se*, the implementation of Israel's settlement policy in the Occupied Territories violates fundamental human rights provisions. The seizure and appropriation of land for Israeli settlements, bypass roads and related infrastructure and the discriminatory allocation of other vital resources, including water, have had a devastating impact on the fundamental rights of the local Palestinian population, including their rights to an adequate standard of living and to housing.

While every country has planning regulations, zoning and enforcement mechanisms, Israel is the only Western country that systematically denies permits and demolishes homes of a particular national group." Jeff Halper (2005)

The Jerusalem Center for Women calls for:

- Israel to stop immediately the destruction of houses, land, and other properties without absolute military necessity as prescribed by international humanitarian law.
- An end to collective punishment in the form of demolishing the homes of relatives of Palestinians known or suspected of involvement in suicide bombings or other attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers as it violates international law.
- All those whose homes have been demolished on illegal and unfair grounds should receive full reparation, including compensation.
- Israel to cease and prohibit the destruction of houses, land or other properties for the purposes of creating and expanding Israeli civilian settlements in the Occupied Territories and the infrastructure to support them.
- The cancellation of all demolition orders of unlicensed houses in the Occupied Territories.

