

Facts and Figures

Israel has destroyed more than three-quarters of the 531 Palestinian villages that it depopulated in 1948–49. Since then, Israel has been conducting house demolition regularly inside the Green Line, especially in the Naqab/Negev, where some 50,000 Palestinian houses face demolition.

In the occupied West Bank, Israel demolished 4,425 Palestinian homes between 1967 and 1974, and 2,400 between 1987 and 1999. During the second *Intifada*, the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) demolished 1,600 houses and damaged another 14,000 between September 2000 and April 2002, affecting 95,000 people. The IOF demolished 2,243 Palestinian houses in Gaza and the West Bank in 2004, leaving some 14,000 Palestinians homeless. Since 2001, Israeli forces damaged 6,395 Palestinian homes in Gaza, housing 58,460 individuals, over half of them children.

Pretexts & Consequences

Urban planning and security concerns form the main pretexts for Israeli authorities to destroy Palestinian family homes, shops, commercial and industrial structures, water and road infrastructures, civil facilities, agricultural fields and crops, particularly in the “unrecognised villages” in Galilee and Naqab/Negev, inside Israel. The State uses discriminatory planning criteria to destroy Palestinians’ property and prevent their development. It also creates security and military zones in the oPt, where house demolition is systematic.

Other State Tools

Inside the Green Line, illegality is not a fact, but a creation. The “unrecognised villages” include Palestinian Arab villages that were not destroyed in 1948, but whose existence the Israeli planners refused to acknowledge. Thus, the State has never provided these villages with the most-basic services such as water and electricity. Moreover, in these villages, in the Arab quarters of such cities as Haifa and Jerusalem, and in all areas of the oPt *de facto* controlled by Israeli planning authorities, building permits to Palestinian Arab citizens or oPt residents are almost always denied. Some families, seeking to provide housing to meet the needs of their natural growth are forced to build unlicensed houses that are then under constant threat of demolition.

Israel's use of the security pretext has produced other State tools under euphemistic titles. As Minister of Agriculture, Ariel Sharon established the “Green Patrol” in 1976 specifically to act in the Naqab/Negev as an “environmental” paramilitary unit. With a budget funded by several ministries, including that of security and parastatal agencies like the Jewish National Fund, the Patrol engages in intimidation, harassment and forcible eviction of Palestinian farmers and Bedouins whom the State accused of stealing State lands. House and property destruction are sometimes accompanied by the spraying of toxic chemicals over houses and fields. On 3 March 2003, airplanes belonging to the Israel Lands Administration released chemicals over 2,000 *dunums* of croplands belonging to the inhabitants of Abda, an “unrecognized village” in the Naqab.

In the oPt, Israel demolishes Palestinian homes under various pretexts: (a) lack of a construction permit, (b) proximity to the Apartheid Wall, or (c) as the house of a Palestinian detainee’s family. The purposes of the house demolition policy are to (1) use adjacent Palestinian land to accommodate Israeli settlement, related infrastructure and buffer zones; (2) prevent the growth of Palestinian towns and villages; (3) punish the families of Palestinians suspected of involvement in violence against Israelis; and (4) collectively punish Palestinian communities where attacks against Israelis allegedly originate. Officially, the Israeli authorities rationalise destruction as “military/security necessity,” “deterrence” and “lack of construction permits.” In 2005, Israel’s Defense Minister cancelled the “deterrence” category as ineffective.

Israel confiscates Palestinian natural resources on a massive scale, including land, forests, cultivated fields, aquifers, water wells, quarries, mineral resources, fisheries and sea beds, the waters and banks of the Dead Sea, seashores and wildlife. Acts of destruction include the sabotage of pumping units; closure of irrigated areas of the Jordan Valley, dumping of toxic waste and other pollution from settler colonies.

Israel has extracts over 85% of Palestinian water from the West Bank aquifers, constituting some 25% of Israel’s water use. This reduces Palestinian water consumption to 82 m³ per capita, as compared with 340 m³ for Israeli citizens and settlers.

The pass system, checkpoints and closures in the oPt are State tools that stymie Palestinian economic activity and deepen impoverishment across the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Right to Adequate Housing in International Law

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing defines it as “the right of every woman, man, youth and child to gain and sustain a secure home and community in which to live in peace and dignity”. General Comment No 4 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has recognized that the right to housing should not be interpreted in a narrow, as merely having a roof over one’s head for example. Rather, it includes: security of tenure; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy.

HLRN has deepened this definition and added the following entitlements: access to environmental goods; freedom from dispossession; information and capacity building; participation and self-expression; return, rehabilitation, compensation, restitution and resettlement; safe environment; security and privacy; land; and water.

Most recently, the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court recognized extensive destruction carried out unlawfully and wantonly as a war crime.

