

UN Housing Expert: “Israel’s policies violate right to housing and need urgent revision”

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JERUSALEM—Raquel Rolnik, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, has said that “after the recent privatization, deregulation and commercialization of public assets in Israel, urban and housing policies have made it increasingly difficult for low income families to obtain affordable accommodation, violating their right to adequate housing.” Speaking at the conclusion of a two week trip to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, Rolnik said “Israel’s housing policies require urgent revision as shown by the massive protests last summer.” According to Rolnik, “the Israeli authorities have had an impressive record of providing adequate housing for waves of Jewish immigrants and refugees but today these policies have failed to respond to the needs of minorities and the socially disadvantaged.”

Palestinian minorities living inside Israel (also known as “Israeli Arabs”) and Palestinians living under military occupation are affected by on-going threats against their right to housing, according to Rolnik. “In very different legal and geographical contexts, from the Galilee and the Negev to East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the Israeli authorities promote a territorial development model that excludes, discriminates against and displaces minorities, particularly affecting Palestinian communities.”

According to Ms. Rolnik, the plans for relocating Bedouins in the Negev—inside Israel—as well as decades of promotion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and in Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem – “are the new frontiers of dispossession of traditional inhabitants, and the implementation of a strategy of Judaization and control of the territory.”

“Throughout my visit I received repeated complaints regarding lack of housing, threats of demolitions and evictions, overcrowding, the disproportional number of demolitions affecting Palestinian communities side by side with the accelerated development of predominantly Jewish settlements”, explained the Rapporteur.

The right to housing is denied further in the occupied Palestinian territory. In East Jerusalem and the areas of the West Bank under Israeli military control, policies adopted by Israel restrict Palestinians from building legally through various means. “The number of permits issued is grossly disproportional to housing needs leading many Palestinians to build without obtaining a permit. As a result, numerous Palestinians homes or extensions to these are considered illegal so that the inhabitants are subjected to eviction orders and the demolition of their houses.” At the same time, Ms. Rolnik noted that settlements, built in violation of international law, have led to a decrease in the amount of land and resources available to Palestinians.

The situation is even worse in Gaza. Rolnik noted that the blockade to Gaza Strip constitutes the most extreme expression of separation and restriction to Palestinian

communities' survival and expansion. "I met persons who were living in substandard conditions and families who had had their homes demolished by Israeli military operations. I urge Israel to end the blockade in order to ensure that the minimum needs of the population living in Gaza are met."

"Israel's spatial strategy has been heavily shaped by security concerns, given the belligerent, conflictive nature of Israel-Palestine relations, with waves of violence and terror. But certainly the nondemocratic and discriminatory elements in Israeli spatial planning and urban development strategies appear to contribute to deepening of the conflict, instead of promoting peace," concluded the Rapporteur.

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