

PUBLIC

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House Demolition

ISRAEL/OCCUPIED TERRITORIES Inhabitants of Sawia village, West Bank

The Israeli army is intending to destroy 41 homes in the small Palestinian village of Sawia, in the West Bank. Almost 250 people are at risk of being left destitute if the destruction goes ahead.

Sawia is in the centre of the West Bank, in an area surrounded by Israeli settlements and by roads used by Israeli settlers. Between 15 August and 15 September 2005, 40 families in the village received notification that the Israeli army is intending to demolishing their homes, because they were built without a permit. Most of these houses have been built in the past five to seven years. Another family received a notification of intent to demolish the rooms which they have added to their house since it was originally built, in the 1950s, for the same reason.

In the past 10 years the Israeli army has demolished more than 2,000 Palestinian homes in the West Bank on the grounds that they were built without a permit. In most of the West Bank, Palestinians must obtain a building permit from the Israeli army if they want to build on their own land, but it is almost impossible for them to obtain these permits. Thousands of Palestinians are effectively compelled to build without a permit because they have no other way to provide shelter for their families.

The Israeli army Legal Advisor Colonel Shlomo Politus told the Israeli Parliament in July 2003 that: "...there are no more construction permits for Palestinians," and the Israeli Army spokesperson told Amnesty International delegates in 1999 that "Our policy is not to approve building in Area C [of the West Bank]".

By contrast, the Israeli authorities have built tens of thousands of houses for Israeli settlers on confiscated Palestinian land throughout the West Bank, in violation of international law.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The West Bank has been under continuous Israeli military occupation since 1967. With the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994, the West Bank was divided into Areas A, B and C. The PA was given responsibility for civil affairs (such as health, education and building permits) in Areas A and B, which together cover some 40 percent of the West Bank territory but contain over 97 percent of the Palestinian population. Israel retained responsibility for both civil affairs and security in Area C, which covers 60 percent of the West Bank and includes most of the unpopulated Palestinian land and the main roads. Areas A and B are not contiguous but are fragmented into some 227 separate enclaves, each surrounded by Area C, which is under Israeli military and civil control.

Israel has confiscated vast areas of Palestinian land to establish Israeli settlements, in violation of international law, where more than 400,000 Israelis now live. More than 100 such Israeli settlements are located in Area C, on confiscated Palestinian land, and Israel is continuing to expand these settlements and to build new ones. In the past 15 years Israel has also expropriated Palestinian-owned land in order to build a large network of roads for the use of Israeli settlers throughout the West Bank. In recent years Palestinian villagers have increasingly been denied access to their farming land and are thus being deprived of their main source of livelihood.

In the past five years the army has also demolished more than 3,000 Palestinian homes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip out of what the Israeli authorities define as "military/security necessity". In reality, this is a

form of collective punishment for attacks against Israelis by Palestinian armed groups. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been made homeless as a result.

In May 2003, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stated in its concluding observations: "...the Committee is gravely concerned about the continuing practice of expropriation of Palestinian properties and resources for the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories." (E/C.12/1/Add.90.7.)

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the notifications of intent to demolish the homes of 41 families in Sawia issued by the Civil Administration branch of the Israeli army since 15 August 2005;
- calling on the Israeli authorities to cancel all orders to demolish unlicensed houses in Sawia and elsewhere in the West Bank;
- calling on the Israeli authorities to remove the responsibility for planning and building policies and regulations in the West Bank from the Israeli army and transfer it to the local Palestinian communities.

APPEALS TO:

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Ministry of Justice
29 Salah al-Din Street
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Israel

Fax: + 972 2 628 7757

Email: sar@justice.gov.il
www.justice.gov.il

Salutation: Dear Minister

Menahem Mazuz
Attorney General
Ministry of Justice
29 Salah al-Din Street
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Fax: + 972 2 627 4481

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Salutation: Dear Attorney General

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Israel accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 November 2005.