

Israel demolishes Palestinian village in occupied West Bank

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Israel Defense Forces (IDF) troops and police stormed a Palestinian village in the occupied West Bank on Tuesday, using bulldozers and backhoes to destroy the homes of 11 families and leaving 74 people, including 41 children, without shelter in the rain and in the midst of a new upsurge in the coronavirus pandemic.

The demolition of the village of Khirbet Humsah, located in the north of the Jordan Valley, was the largest such action in nearly a decade. It was carried out under the pretext that the dwellings had been erected on land reserved for Israeli military exercises.

The residents, who raise livestock, said that they have lived there since 1967, when Israel illegally occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem, displacing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

“This is a great injustice,” Khirbet Humsah resident Harb Abu al-Kabash told the Israeli daily *Haaretz*. “We didn’t know they were coming and we didn’t prepare, and now we are facing rain.” A father of eight, Abu al-Kabash, added that “they came in the past to demolish a few structures, but this was the largest demolition so far, it’s the entire village.”

B’Tselem, the anti-occupation Israeli NGO, provided a grim account of the scope and criminality of the IDF demolition: “The forces demolished 18 tents and sheds that housed 11 families, numbering 74 people in total, 41 of them minors. The forces also demolished 29 tents and sheds used as livestock enclosures, three storage sheds, nine tents used as kitchens, 10 portable toilets, 10 livestock pens, 23 water containers, two solar panels, and feeding and watering troughs for livestock. They also destroyed more than 30 tons of fodder for livestock and confiscated a vehicle and two tractors belonging to three residents.”

Yvonne Helle, a UN humanitarian coordinator in the

occupied Palestinian territories, said that Israeli forces had destroyed 76 structures in Khirbet Humsah, “more than in any other single demolition in the past decade.”

Residents of the village had filed petitions over the course of years with the Israeli High Court against the threat to evict them, all of them denied.

The prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, Mohammed Shtayyeh, denounced the demolition and charged that Israel “chose this evening to commit another crime” because it knew that world attention would be focused on the US elections.

Peter Santo, the spokesman for the European Union, which had provided assistance to the demolished Palestinian community in Khirbet Humsah, condemned the action by Israel, while urging it to halt all such demolitions, particularly in the face of the threat from COVID-19. Santo also pointed out that 52 Palestinian schools are currently slated for demolition, denying the right of children to an education.

The EU’s statements of regret over Israel’s attacks on the Palestinian population and laments that they impede the already stone-dead “two-state solution” are never translated into any action.

Unsurprisingly, Washington, in the throes of an unprecedented election crisis, said nothing about the latest Israeli war crime. The Trump administration, in any case, has declared its support for Israel’s settlement policy, while the Democrats and their presidential candidate Joe Biden have provided unstinting support for Israel.

According to data compiled by B’Tselem, more than 800 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem have lost their homes to demolitions so far this year, more than half of them children. This number is higher than that for any full year since 2016. Israeli forces also demolished 301 Palestinian non-residential

structures in the first ten months of this year, including humanitarian infrastructure such as water cisterns and electricity grids, denying the Palestinian population vitally needed resources to combat the coronavirus pandemic. The patent aim of this campaign of demolitions and destruction—justified in the name of building regulations and military necessity—is to make life for Palestinians unbearable so that Israel can seize more and more of their land.

The latest brutal destruction and eviction was carried out in what is designated as Area C under the 1993 Oslo Accords between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel. It remains under Israel's military control, as opposed to Areas A, which is administered by the Palestinian Authority, and B, which is administered jointly by the PA and Israel.

Area C, which occupies three-fifths of the West Bank, includes 135 settlements housing some 390,000 Israelis, along with 532 villages and communities that are home to 150,000 Palestinians. While Area C comprises a contiguous territory that includes virtually all of the West Bank's natural resources, Areas A and B are made up of 165 separate pieces of land, divided by settlements, security roads and military checkpoints and virtually surrounded by Area C.

Palestinians in Area C are barred from building any homes or digging wells or erecting any other kind of infrastructure without securing military permits, which are almost invariably denied. According to the Israeli anti-settlement group Peace Now, less than 2 percent of permit applications were approved between 2009 and 2016.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had signaled earlier this year his intention of annexing the bulk of Area C, including the Jordan Valley, as part of a "Greater Israel" policy. To the extent that the Palestinian population would not be expelled from these territories, they would be subjected to apartheid-style oppression, backed by the "Nation State Law" enacted under Netanyahu, which establishes Jewish supremacy as the foundation of the state.

While Netanyahu formally agreed to postpone the annexation as part of the US-brokered "peace" deal with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain (in reality a deal to solidify an anti-Iranian bloc in preparation for region-wide war), de facto annexation continues uninterrupted.

With the prospect that Trump will be removed from the White House in January, there have been growing demands for Netanyahu to push ahead with annexation.

Yossi Dagan, the head of the Settlements Council in the northern West Bank, told Israeli Army Radio that Netanyahu must proceed to an immediate implementation of the Israeli annexation plan, "because with each passing day, things become more difficult." Similarly, Knesset Member Bezalel Smotrich of the extreme right-wing Tkuma party said that if Trump loses the US elections, "we will have to pressure Netanyahu to implement and establish sovereignty before Joe Biden becomes president."

These hysterical demands aside, there is no reason to believe that a Biden administration will do anything to hinder Israel's annexation policy.

The Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly, which is dedicated to political and decolonization affairs, voted by an overwhelming majority Wednesday for a resolution condemning Israel's illegal settlement policy. Its resolution charged that Israel is guilty of "the transfer of nationals of the occupying Power into the occupied territories, the confiscation of land, the forced transfer of Palestinian civilians, including Bedouin families, the exploitation of natural resources, the fragmentation of territory and other actions against the Palestinian civilian population and the civilian population in the occupied Syrian Golan that are contrary to international law," i.e., the Geneva Conventions, which were enacted in the wake of the Second World War to prevent the repetition of similar actions carried out by Germany's Nazi regime.



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