



“With Our Own Hands”

A report on what happens when Israel forces Palestinian families
to demolish their own homes

January 2012



المركز الفلسطيني للإرشاد
Palestinian Counseling Center

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A report on what happens when Israel forces Palestinian families
to demolish their own homes

Palestinian Counseling Center, Jerusalem

January 2012

Cover photo of a Palestinian man in Jerusalem's Old City examining the rubble after he was forced by Israeli authorities to demolish an extension to his home. ©PCC

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As international pressure has grown on Israel to halt its policy of demolishing Palestinian homes, Israeli officials have increasingly forced Palestinians to destroy structures the officials have deemed illegal. The phenomenon, while underreported, appears to be on the rise.

This policy of forcing Palestinians to destroy their own homes is part of a broader policy of Israeli ethnic cleansing in occupied East Jerusalem, where Palestinians are denied housing, residency, and services as means of forcing them out of the city. Meanwhile, Israel builds Jewish settlements in the same occupied lands, in contravention of international law.

A 2009 study¹ by the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center of 148 families living in Jerusalem's Old City who had been given home demolition orders found that 82%² of the homeowners surveyed (121 families) had been ordered by Israeli officials to demolish their homes themselves.

As detailed in this report, the Palestinian Counseling Center has interviewed 10 families that demolished their own homes to examine the problems they faced and how they might be supported. All of the families interviewed said that they were forced to demolish their own homes in response to an array of pressures applied by Israeli officials.

- **Fines and detention** Most families said they could not bear the thousands of shekels in fines that were levied, and demolished their own property to put an end to these sanctions.
- **Psychological pressure** Family members spoke of the trauma of being forced to demolish their own homes and showed signs of distress during the interviews. Not only do families experience the trauma of losing the dream they invested in, they also feel shame that they could not comply with the Palestinian national consensus that calls for steadfastness in Jerusalem.
- **Lack of options** All of the families said that they regretted having constructed their new home or extension to their home. Once Israel issued them a demolition order, they considered it final and could not see any other outcome than the destruction of their home. Researchers noted that the families were largely unaware of their rights.
- **Absence of support** Family members reported receiving little support from Palestinian officials and other organizations.
- **Shortage of funds** Respondents said that financial support would have kept them from demolishing their property themselves.

Due to these findings, the Palestinian Counseling Center recommends that Palestinians develop a national policy aimed at addressing the legal, financial and psychosocial needs of families whose homes are demolished, including those who are forced to demolish their own homes. Israel must halt its policy of home demolitions, stop forcing Palestinians to destroy their own property, and compensate the victims of this illegal policy. The international community is responsible for pressuring Israel to comply with international law through advocacy, legal action and implementing the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign called for by Palestinian civil society in 2005.

¹ Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center, "Il-hadam fil il balad qadima: il-ihitajat il-qanuniya wa il-hadam il-thati", 2009.

² All statistics cited from the JLAC report have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

INTRODUCTION

Israel's policy of demolishing Palestinian homes is on the rise, with 622 Palestinian homes and other structures destroyed in the occupied West Bank, 42 of them in East Jerusalem, in 2011.³ This meant that almost 1,100 Palestinians lost their homes last year, over 80% more than those who were displaced in 2010.⁴ This was also the highest number of demolitions in one year since at least 2005.⁵

Since Israel's occupation began in 1967, it has demolished 2,000 homes in East Jerusalem. The city has been a focus of efforts to gain and maintain a demographic Jewish majority. Israel has used a combination of policies including restricting Palestinian construction, demolishing "illegal" construction, building Jewish settlements and stripping Palestinian residents of their residency status to limit the growth of the Palestinian population in Jerusalem. Currently, approximately 270,000 Palestinians live in East Jerusalem, with 200,000 Israeli settlers in their midst.

“The continued pattern of settlement expansion in East Jerusalem combined with forcible eviction of long residing Palestinians are creating an intolerable situation that can only be described, in its cumulative impact, as a form of ethnic cleansing.”—Richard Falk, *United Nations Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories*, March 21, 2011

Israel's policies have forcibly displaced thousands of civilians in contravention of its obligations as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention. International law forbids “any destruction by the occupying power of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons” except where such destruction is “absolutely necessary by military operations”. The needless destruction of civilian property is considered a grave breach of the convention and is prosecutable in international courts. Moreover, the Fourth Geneva Convention forbids the forced transfer of the civilian population by an occupying power.

According to the United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, at least 32% of all Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem lack building permits, meaning that some 93,100 residents are at risk of being displaced by having their homes demolished.⁶ High fees, restrictive zoning and discriminatory policies prevent Palestinians in Jerusalem from obtaining permission to build.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Structures demolished in East Jerusalem	16	41	45	99	133	90	81	75	93	84	82	42

³ These statistics include self-demolitions, although OCHA is still confirming some cases of self-demolition in Jerusalem and warns that some cases go unreported. See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Demolitions and Forced Displacement in the Occupied West Bank”, January 2012, available online at http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_demolitions_factSheet_january_2012_english.pdf (last accessed February 5, 2012)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Amnesty International, “Record number of Palestinians displaced by demolitions as Quartet continues to talk”, December 13, 2011, available online at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/news-item/record-number-of-palestinians-displaced-by-demolitions-as-quartet-continues-to-talk> (last accessed December 17, 2011)

⁶ UNOCHA, “Demolitions and Forced Displacement...”, January 2012.



A girl makes her way over the rubble after her family was forced to demolish an addition they built to expand their home in the Old City of Jerusalem. ©PCC

As international pressure has grown on Israel to halt its policy of demolishing Palestinian homes, Israeli officials have increasingly pressured Palestinians to destroy structures deemed illegal and thus avoid incurring further fines and costs.

The number of cases where Palestinians have demolished their own homes to evade fines or prosecution is believed to be only slightly below the number of homes demolished by Israeli authorities.⁷ Those who gather statistics about self-demolitions say that these numbers are not reliable because Palestinians who demolish their own homes feel ashamed and avoid coming forward. Al-Maqdese for Society Development has counted 289 homeowners that have demolished their own homes after pressure from the Israeli authorities since 2000.⁸

A 2009 study⁹ by the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center of 148 families living in Jerusalem's Old City who had been given home demolition orders found that 82%¹⁰ of the homeowners surveyed (121 families) had been asked by Israeli officials to demolish their homes themselves. Of those who said they had been asked to do so, 45% said that they were willing to demolish the threatened area themselves.

⁷ "No Place Like Home: House Demolitions in East Jerusalem", Meir Margalit, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, March 2007.

⁸ "Report of House Demolitions in East Jerusalem 2011," Al Maqdese for Society Development, available online at <http://home.al-maqdese.org/attachment/000000388.pdf> (last accessed January 20, 2012)

⁹ Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center, "Il-hadam fil il balad qadima: il-ihtijat il-qanuniya wa il-hadam il-thati", 2009.

¹⁰ All statistics cited from the JLAC report have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

When these 55 families were asked to select reasons why they were ready to demolish the construction themselves, most said they had multiple reasons. Those who gave one reason cited first the heavy fines imposed on them (23%), and second the lack of support from Palestinian officials to fight the demolition order (13%).

Reason given	% of respondents	No. of respondents
Monetary fines	23%	12
The construction was small when compared to the costs	0%	0
Fear of arrest	9%	5
Lack of support from the Palestinian Authority	13%	7
Lack of support from the community	0%	0
Fear of damage to the pre-existing and neighboring buildings	9%	5
All of the above	47%	2

Of the 121 families who had been ordered by the court to demolish their own homes, 31% were threatened with fines of more than NIS 50,000 (about \$13,500) if they did not comply.

Fine amount	% of 121 respondents asked
Less than NIS 10,000	0%
NIS 11,000 to 20,000	27%
NIS 31,000 to 40,000	14%
NIS 41,000 to 50,000	12%
More than NIS 50,000	31%

The socioeconomic portrait drawn of the 148 families included in the study makes clear that these fines are well beyond their means. Most families had a combined income of less than NIS 4,000 a month (40% making between NIS 3,999 and NIS 3,000, and 2% making between NIS 2,000 and 2,999). In other words, most of these families would have to dedicate more than a year's income (with no other expenses) to pay fines levied in the amount of NIS 50,000 or more, the amount that is most common.

The families surveyed were large, with 45% numbering between 5-8 members and 35% numbering 9-12. Thirteen percent of the families had more than 12 members living under one roof.

This research seeks to shed light upon the decision-making process of families that decide to demolish their homes, as well as assess the outcomes of that decision for the family members. In the process, the study makes recommendations for organizations and officials concerning this issue.

METHODOLOGY

A sample of 10 families who had demolished their own homes was selected as the focus of this research, and interviews were conducted with family heads and some family members.

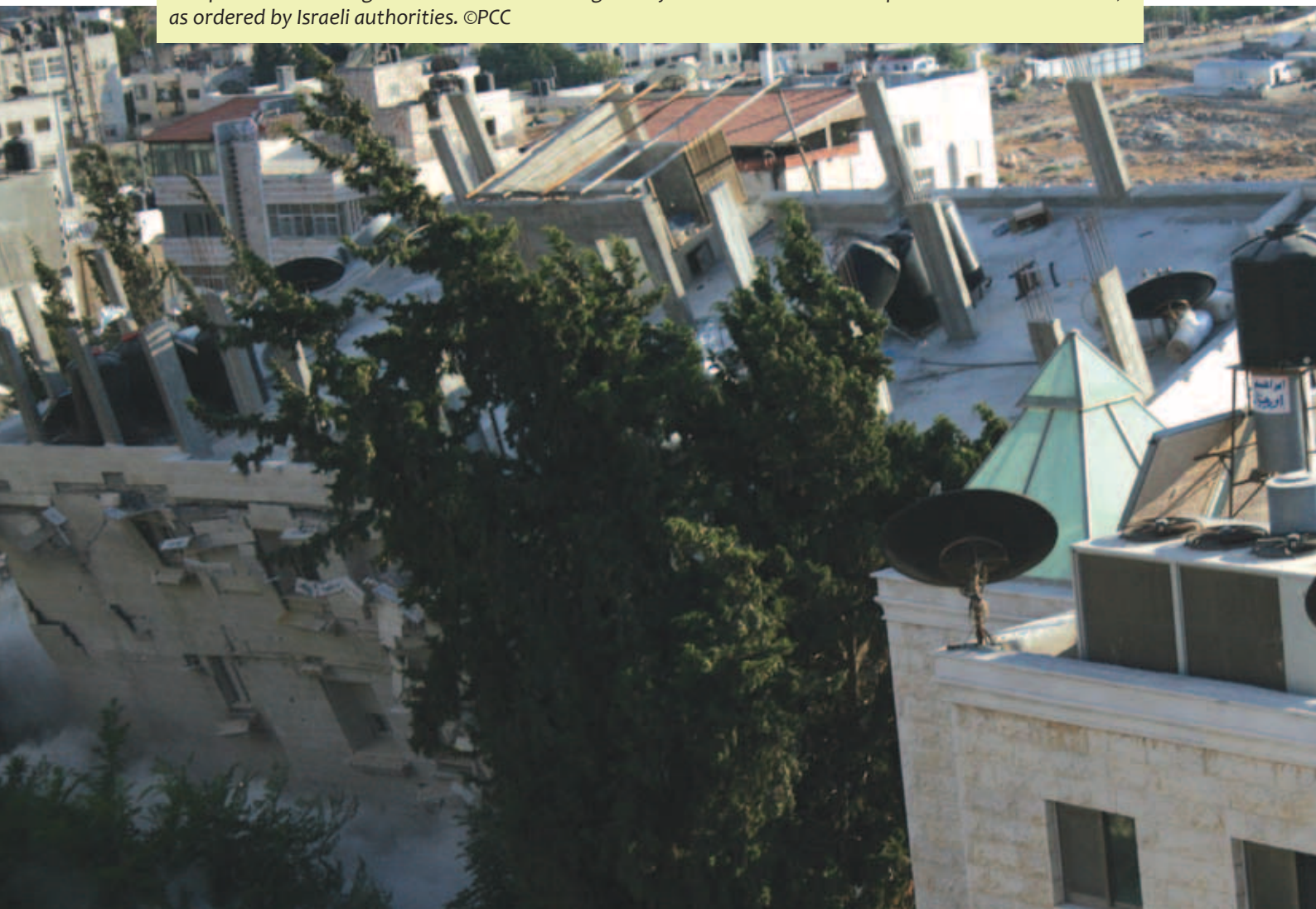
The research team used a thematic interview model to conduct the interviews.¹¹ Interviewers began by asking an open question about the family's "life story", with more follow-up questions then asked to gather details about the family's house construction and subsequent demolition. Finally, further questions were asked to clarify answers that were not given during the interview. The researchers (a group of trained psychologists) acted professionally, trying not to comment on or express sympathies with the account of the interviewees. Often interviews adopted somewhat of a free form, with interjections and asides. The interviews were then analyzed by theme and theoretical axes applied.

This very small sample is not meant to draw statistical conclusions, but to offer a qualitative glimpse of the problems these families face and how they can be supported.

The exact questionnaire used can be obtained from the Palestinian Counseling Centre.

¹¹ While interviewers had planned to use a biographical model, what they found was that it was difficult to interview solely one individual; the presence of other family members during the discussions caused them to shift to a cooperative interviewing approach.

An apartment building in Beit Hanina leans dangerously to the side as its owner proceeds with demolition, as ordered by Israeli authorities. ©PCC



FINDINGS

Trapped in economic crisis: Why do Palestinians in Jerusalem demolish their own homes?

Palestinian families that decide to build in Jerusalem without a hard-to-obtain building permit are already under pressure. While Palestinians represent about one-third of Jerusalem's population, Israeli policies have confined them to just 7% of the city's area, most of it inadequate housing.¹²

Families spoke of the difficulties they faced living in crowded conditions. For women, the lack of privacy and space was especially aggravating.

"Truthfully, I am bothered inside. I want to have the freedom to do as I wish in my house, in a room, or in anything. You want to be able to enter the bathroom to change at your own convenience. For this reason, [my husband] wanted to expand the house so that the kids can be on their own. My son started to need his own room, and so we began putting in a new room behind the bathroom closet. [My husband] wanted to expand this room, the bathroom and the kitchen, which is makeshift: two cupboards and a small sink."—wife of homeowner

"I thought to build an apartment. I said that this would help the children; they would have more room to sleep. I would have a comfortable living room. Look how nice it is... A room, a kitchen and a bathroom. Now we are relaxed inside. Every daughter has her own kingdom, her own privacy, her thoughts... Otherwise, you have to restrict her. You have to tell her, 'This is what there is. This is reality'."—homeowner

The families interviewed in this study weighed their current situation (crowded quarters, lack of privacy, inability to bequeath property to the new generation, etc.) against the risks and decided to build.

The respondents were by no means wealthy, but had a little bit of disposable income that they decided to invest by expanding or building their home. They saw that renting property to meet their needs would quickly eat up their savings. Construction, on the other hand, was seen as a way to improve their difficult lives. What happened after they built, however (which none of the families interviewed foresaw), is that the construction became a serious financial strain due to Israeli measures.

All of the ten families interviewed for this report said that they decided to demolish their own homes after an array of pressures applied by Israeli officials.

The most effective of these pressures appears to have been fines levied before the self-demolition or the threat of fines and fees if the family refused to demolish the house on their own. According to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, between 2001 and 2006, the Israeli city court collected more than NIS 150 million (approx \$39 million) in fines, around 70% of it from East Jerusalem residents.¹³

¹² Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions website, http://www.icahd.org/?page_id=5374 (last accessed January 20, 2012)

¹³ Ibid., http://www.icahd.org/?page_id=5374 (last accessed 20 January 2012).

“They sent us the demolition order. We had to pay another fine. They [falsely] told us that they would put a stop to the demolition order if we paid the fine. Then they told us: ‘Demolish’. I told my wife, ‘No lawyers.’ We don’t need to waste another two years working with a lawyer and an engineer. We went to several organizations and we told them, ‘Come and see.’ It was Ramadan, just before Eid al-Fitr. We told [the Israeli officials], ‘Please give us another month.’ We are supposed to remain calm. They told us if we didn’t demolish with our own hands, we would pay NIS 16,000 [or \$4,211 in fines]. No one wants to demolish their own home. In the end, they issued the demolition order and even if we hired 100 lawyers, it wouldn’t have helped... In this situation, what can one do? Either you pay NIS 40,000 [\$10,526] for the courts and end up removing the rubble [from the Israeli demolition], or you demolish on your own... There are some who take the quick way out, and there are those who stick it out to the end but still have the same result. I still have two rooms and so I decided to stick with that.”—homeowner

According to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 65% of Palestinian families in Jerusalem live below the poverty line—double that of the Jewish population. In 2007, the poverty line was less than a monthly income of \$770 a month for a family of two and \$1,400 for a family of five.¹⁴

Likewise, the families interviewed were all in difficult economic conditions at the time of the interview. Families were large with small incomes. Half of the families had one wage earner, 20% had more than one wage-earner, and 30% had no wage earners at all. None of the families included any female wage-earners.

None of the adults in any of the families interviewed held academic degrees from a college or university.

Interviewees also talked about the difficulties of getting a fair hearing in the Israeli system. One man spoke of being asked to inform on his neighbors in order to get papers saying that he has a clean record. These papers are required to get a permit to build.

Steps to House Demolition

Israeli officials fine the owner of a property for illegal construction and ask him/her to demolish it. The fine is calculated per meter of construction, for example, in 2005, \$300 per meter was standard, with a possible surcharge. Once this notice is received, the home can be demolished by the city 24 hours later. All legal costs involved are charged to the homeowner.

If the homeowner does not comply, additional fines are added to the original amount.

If the homeowner still doesn’t comply, he/she can be jailed for three months or more.

If the construction has taken place in Jerusalem’s Old City, Israel’s antiquities department comes to check the property. All fees for this are charged to the homeowner. Sometimes the antiquities department will decide to dig further, charging this also to the homeowner.

If the family still doesn’t demolish the construction and Israeli authorities ultimately destroy the home or structure, the family is forced to pay the cost of the demolition and the clearing of the rubble, often amounting to hundreds of thousands of shekels. Families are often given only a few minutes to remove their things from the home before the demolition.

While a court order can delay the demolition of a home for years, no court has ever overturned a demolition order.

¹⁴ “Neglect and poverty’ – Life as a Palestinian in Jerusalem”, Omar Karmi, *The National*, May 13, 2010, available online at <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/neglect-and-poverty-life-as-a-palestinian-in-jerusalem> (last accessed January 21, 2012). The poverty line used by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel is the same used by the Israeli Centre for Statistics, which is 50% of the median available household income.



The Abu Eisheh building in Jerusalem's Beit Hanina neighborhood was demolished by Israeli authorities using explosives. ©PCC

*“There is no work and there is no official permit [hasan ser wil sluk]. All of us have been in jail. Where are we supposed to get official permission? How are we supposed to feed our kids? ‘Come get the permit and work with us,’ [the Israelis say]. There is no permit without informing on this person and that person and that person. In the end, we will go blind. If you don’t talk, then they say, ‘we will break you’... Like someone frozen in place, I look around and say to myself, ‘if they don’t let us live in our land, with our families, then where are we supposed to live?’ This state wants to empty the world; they want the people to leave and the country to be theirs. This is their basic premise: I came to destroy your house and you have two choices, ‘Either you work with us or we will demolish your home. Period. That’s it.’
—brother of homeowner*

Ultimately, the financial burden placed by the accumulation of fines and legal costs alters the family’s perceptions, causing them to ask, “Is it worth it to remain here?” Whereas arrest seemed to carry with it a positive connotation of sacrifice for the good of the collective, the financial costs had no such meaning and weighed much more heavily on the interviewees.

The families interviewed talked about the choices they had to make, whether to feed themselves or pay the fines demanded. Family members expressed guilt about the options they had before them: to remain steadfast in Jerusalem or to provide for their family members.

‘We paid with our heart’: What are the psychosocial implications of self-demolition?

The impact of home demolitions on families has been shown to be prolonged and difficult (see box on p. 14). The interviews carried out for this survey showed similar effects among families who demolish their own homes.

The families interviewed for this study showed signs of psychological distress at their predicament. They experienced what could be described as a “shrinking” of their financial and emotional resources. They spoke of mood disturbances and anxiety, difficulties relating to each other and to their children, feelings of guilt and problems adjusting.

Family members also talked about an array of social problems, including difficulty fitting into a collective national identity, and feelings of social abandonment and helplessness.

*“I tell you, the anxiety is something incredible. You come and talk to [my husband] and you find him antagonistic, even though he is usually a calm person. This has changed him.”
—wife of homeowner*

*“This sets you back 100 years. I am one of the people who, when I got the order, sat on the sofa and started crying. I protected my children, you see? How can I, against my will, send my children to live far away from me? How can I send them away to homes that don’t even exist yet? It is so difficult. We were destroyed psychologically. [It is] psychological demolition. Social demolition, not house demolition. My relationship with my wife and children was deeply affected. I can’t even explain to you. The mental stress is expressed at home.”
—homeowner*

“[The Israelis say], ‘Either you pay a fine of NIS 60,000 [\$15,789] and we destroy it, or you destroy it.’ For that amount of money, you could build an entire house. If we had NIS 150,000 [\$39,474], you would find us still in our home. My husband decided to destroy it ourselves. We talked to a contractor that asked for NIS 93,000 [\$24,474] to destroy it. I told him, ‘Just do it yourself.’ My husband ended up destroying it with his own hands. He became ill after that. How could he have destroyed it himself? Malik paid with his heart to build it. It cost us NIS 250,000 [\$65,790] to build.”—wife of homeowner

Family members interviewed showed signs of what is known as “cognitive dissonance”, or what happens psychologically when a person is forced to do something that they don’t want to do. People experiencing this may feel shame or anger and then seek to resolve the dissonance by altering their perceptions of events.

In this survey, interviewees diminished the importance of the act of demolishing their own homes. Their comments showed a deep sensitivity that they were acting outside a national Palestinian consensus that they must fight to stay in their homes and on their land; they sought to justify the act and show that they had no other choice.

One family defended the decision to demolish their own home by saying that city officials promised them they would be granted a permit to build in the future in return, despite all the evidence suggesting that this promise would not be fulfilled.

“I told him [my husband] ‘Look, we built a small room, not a castle, and because of that they want to drain our lifeblood. We have to destroy it.”—wife of homeowner

“Thank God, we still have a place to go. There are people worse off, like that woman in Sheikh Jarrah who is living in a tent [because she was forced out of her home]. It is only one room. If that room goes, we still have the old room.”—homeowner

CASE STUDY: ‘I was killing the dream’

Mahmoud and his family, including his wife, three sons and his 70-year-old mother, lived in a one-room home in Wadi Joz in Jerusalem. When his boys became teenagers, he began to think about expanding his home so that they would have room in the future

Mahmoud built the extension, and then was surprised, he said, to receive a fine from the Israeli Jerusalem city officials, for building without a permit. Gradually, the fines compounded until they amounted to NIS 50,000 [\$13,158]. The city told him that he must destroy the extension himself or be charged the cost of demolition and fines of NIS 60,000 [\$15,790]. That was the straw that broke the camel’s back, and Mahmoud decided to demolish the extension himself.

“I felt at that moment as if they had given me a knife and told me to go kill myself,” he recalls. “When I started demolishing the house, I felt that I had murdered myself and my wife and my children all together. I was killing the dream of a secure and stable life.”

“My children have now reached their twenties. How are we supposed to all live in one room? I do not know what is [the officials’] argument? Is this reasonable?”

Mahmoud’s family arrived in Wadi Joz before the 1967 war. “Here in this place, under the tree near our house, my uncle was killed in the war as the shells flew over their heads,” he says. “Days later, I was born and my grandmother named me after this uncle.”

“We will remain steadfast in this land forever,” Mahmoud says. “The land is ours. I will continue building forever, even if they continue with their demolitions. This is our fate as Palestinians—our hope is destroyed and the settlements grow and grow and grow under the care of the authorities. We have no sense of how long this will continue.”

The truth, in fact, is that the demolished space was important to these families. It provided an important function, one they originally thought worthy but were forced to abandon.

The outcome of this contradiction between options and the social norm is ultimately emotional breakdown—“social destruction”, one interviewee called it. Often, the shame is so great for these families that they are not willing to state that they have demolished their homes themselves.

THE IMPACT OF HOME DEMOLITIONS

This study by the Palestinian Counseling Center follows a broader 2009 study by Save the Children UK, the Palestinian Counseling Centre and the Welfare Association that examined the psychosocial effect of home demolitions. After finding that the destruction of a home deals a devastating blow to children and their families, the PCC wanted to know if families forced to demolish their own homes had similar experiences or needs. Both investigations found that all of these families struggle with deteriorating social, financial, mental, and educational conditions, which can permanently damage the family structure.

The 2009 study profiled 54 families whose houses were demolished by Israeli military forces between the years 2000 and 2006, and two families whose houses were demolished in 1992 and 1994.

The findings showed that house demolitions cause:

- **Displacement and Instability** Immediately after their home is demolished, most families are forced to find housing wherever they can, either crowding together or breaking up the family unit. Fifty-seven percent of families surveyed never returned to their original residences. Most families took at least two years to find a permanent place of residence.
- **Disruption of Family Life** The family enters into a state of shock immediately following a house demolition. Six months afterwards and longer, the family still suffers from chronic disruptions in family life. Poor health conditions burgeon, children’s schooling suffers, and the family struggles economically.
- **Family Separation** Twenty-six percent of families experience the temporary separation of one or more family members from the family unit following a house demolition.
- **Trauma** Children who have had their homes demolished fare significantly worse than their peers on a range of mental health indicators, including: withdrawal; somatic complaints; depression/anxiety; social difficulties—even six months after the demolition. Ninety-seven percent of mothers and fathers suffered from trauma-related symptoms after the demolition of their home.
- **Injury, Poor Health, and Death** Some families lost family members due to violence during the demolition. One-third of parents whose homes were demolished were in danger of developing mental health disorders, and some reported a decline in physical health.
- **Poverty** The average monthly income of families surveyed was the equivalent of \$355—well below absolute (deep) poverty lines and relative poverty lines (\$414 and \$518 respectively) for a family of six in the occupied Palestinian territory.

‘Where are we to go?’: What can be done

Most striking in the responses of the family members interviewed were their strong feelings of helplessness and abandonment. Once they had been issued a demolition order on their homes, all of the families without exception saw the homes’ final destruction as inevitable, with no other possible resolution.

“They gave us a warning in July 2009. If we hadn’t listened to people then we wouldn’t have paid those fines. The organizations come and said, ‘Wait, God willing, there is a solution.’ In the meantime, you are on pins and needles and don’t know what to do. They said, ‘Don’t demolish. Be patient.’ When we got to the point that we had paid NIS 1,500 [\$395 in fines], we reached our limit. The journalists came and wrote about us and they even got my wife’s name wrong. We just wasted our time with them.”—homeowner

All of the families regretted building or expanding their homes. One woman said that she was considering leaving Jerusalem as a result of her family’s demolition of their home.

“This house is completely not healthy. If I wanted to build another time, Israel’s threats [would prevent me]. The result of all this neglect [in the up-keep of the home] is that I have almost decided to leave. Sometimes I think about moving to live in the West Bank and thus, being able to relax. In our life, this is our main problem. Sometimes I think about taking the kids and emigrating outside.”—wife of homeowner

Moreover, the respondents said that they had not received adequate support from Palestinian officials or local and international organizations. Twenty percent received financial support from the Palestinian Authority and 20% received some kind of assistance from Palestinian organizations, although none of that assistance was legal or financial.

“They [Israeli officials] pulled out the fine and studied my social and economic situation and decided that I should pay NIS 110,000 [\$29,947] through a lawyer. Every month I pay NIS 1,000 [\$263]. That means I need about 10 years to pay this off. Then they asked me to make a new [building] plan and space plan and a permit. The lawyer and the court together cost about NIS 75,000 [\$19,737]. Of this is \$9,000 for the engineer... This is so that the lawyer can get an extension and get the license so they won’t destroy the house. If people would help us financially, we would build again. We are not in need of legal organizations; we need the money to build. We don’t need Fateh or Hamas or the political organizations [tanzeemat]. All of that has failed. We Jerusalemites don’t believe in any of this. None of them have helped us. Most of the people who have had their homes destroyed have not been compensated, and neither the Palestinian Authority nor the civil servants nor our people are interested in the homes that are destroyed in the Old City. Where are we supposed to go?”—homeowner

“Many times we went to organizations and nothing happened. The Red Crescent came and asked us for a paper. Once a girl came and took pictures and asked questions and then forgot everything.”—homeowner

“They brought us a good guy [from UNRWA] and we spoke to him. Then I went to UNRWA every Tuesday to talk to them. If you have a UN card [stating that you are a refugee], they are supposed to receive you and help you, but they didn’t do anything. In the end I started to feel like, a beggar, God forbid. So I just stopped.”—homeowner

This survey found that all respondents felt monetary support would have aided them and prevented them from having to demolish their own homes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To Israel

- Stop the illegal policy of home demolitions and forcing families to demolish their own homes and comply with its obligations as an occupying power
- Compensate the victims of its illegal policies of forcing families to demolish their own homes.

To Jerusalem residents and local civil society

- Conduct an economic feasibility study measuring the various financial costs of Israel's policy with the goal of determining how to best aid families that face the demolition of their homes
- Conduct awareness-raising programs among residents to share information about available legal and other avenues to prevent self-demolition
- Provide free legal assistance to these families that will allow them to navigate the Israeli system and prevent feelings of abandonment and hopelessness

To the Palestine Liberation Organization

- Develop a national strategy to address the phenomenon of home demolitions and all its ramifications
- Work with Jerusalem civil society and the international community in meeting the needs of these families through the above-mentioned feasibility study, legal aid, psychosocial support and other economic support programs
- Take legal action to halt Israel's crimes against the Palestinian civilian population

To the international community

- Fulfill its responsibility to do all that is necessary to force Israel to halt the policy of demolishing homes and forcing families to demolish their own homes. Pressure Israel to abide by its obligations as an occupying power
- Take legal action to halt Israel's crimes against the Palestinian civilian population
- Heed the call made by Palestinian civil society in 2005 to boycott, divest from and sanction Israel in order to hold Israel accountable for its actions
- Support Jerusalem civil society in providing services through the above-mentioned feasibility study, legal aid, psychosocial support and other economic support programs

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