

ence 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 Researchers noted that the families were largely unaware of their rights and for this reason they demolished their own homes. All of the families said that if they had been more aware of their rights, they would have been able to make better choices. Once Israel issued them a demolition order, they considered it final and could not see any other outcome than the destruction of their homes.

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.

It is clear that more assistance is needed to help these families as they struggle, first with the pressures of fighting the demolition order, and then with the consequences of their decision to demolish.

Experience shows that, while no demolition order has ever been overturned, court

“The thing that strikes me about this policy is that it is so sinister. It strikes exactly at the point of weakness of the public. The Israelis see that there is no support system and that people are ashamed to report on self-demolitions and they attack them from every angle.”

—Rima Awad, Palestinian Counseling Center

decisions can delay home demolitions for years. In the meantime, the international community must continue to pressure Israel to stop its home demolition policy.

An economic feasibility study must be carried out through local civil society, with the sup-

port of the Palestinian leadership and international community, to weigh the various financial implications of demolition orders and how these families can be supported financially and through programming.

Cover photo: A Palestinian man surveys the rubble after demolishing an extension to his home, as ordered by Israeli authorities. ©PCC



STOP

**Israel's policy of forcing
Palestinians to demolish their own homes**



We recommend 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.

Finally, 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.

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The rubble of a Beit Hanina home after its owner demolished it due to Israeli pressure. ©PCC

SELF-DEMOLITION ON THE RISE

The phenomenon of Israel forcing Palestinians to demolish their own homes or property in order to avoid Israeli fines, imprisonment or demolition by Israel, appears to be on the rise.

Organizations that count these types of demolitions say that the phenomenon is difficult to measure because families who destroy their own homes feel ashamed. Still, they say, there appears to be nearly as many Palestinians destroying their

own homes as homes destroyed by Israel.

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. This meant that almost 1,100 Palestinians lost their homes last year, over 80% more than those who were displaced in 2010. This was the highest number of demolitions since at least 2005.¹

Since Israel's occupation began in 1967, it has demolished 2,000 homes in East Jerusalem. International law prohibits the forced displacement or transfer of civilians as well as the destruction of private property, unless absolutely necessary for military operations. As Israel faces pressure to halt the illegal home demolition policy, it increasingly tries to force Palestinians to destroy their own homes or property by levying fines or imprisoning homeowners.

Al-Maqdese for Society Development has counted 289

homeowners that were forced to demolish their own homes between 2000 and 2011.²

A 2009 study³ 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% of the homeowners surveyed (121 families) had been asked by Israeli officials to demolish their homes themselves. Almost half said they were willing to consider destroying their own property.

ECONOMIC & PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE

The Palestinian Counseling Center interviewed 10 families that demolished their own homes to learn of the problems they face and how they might be supported. The complete report, "By Our Own Hands", can be viewed at our website, www.pcc-jer.org.

All of the families interviewed said that they were forced to demolish their own homes due to an array of pressures applied by Israeli officials.

Fines and imprisonment

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 anxiety and stress they felt as the fines accumulated and they were forced to decide whether to demolish their own home, or continue to provide for the family. Not only did they experi-

¹These statistics include self-demolitions, although OCHA is still confirming some cases of self-demolition in Jerusalem. 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) and Amnesty International, "Record number of Palestini-

ans 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)

²"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 20 January 2012)

³Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center, "Il-hadam fil il balad qadima: il-ihitajat il-qanuniya wa il-hadam il-thati", 2009. All statistics cited from this report have been rounded up.