

URGENT ACTION

1150 PEOPLE AT RISK OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Jamila and Muhammad Abu Sabha and their six children are one of some 180 Palestinian families living in Masafer Yatta, in the south of the West Bank in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, who are at risk of forced displacement. Around 1,150 Palestinians, half of whom are children, currently live in nine villages that are slated for complete demolition. After 23 years of legal procedures, the Israeli Supreme Court concluded on 4 May 2022 that the eviction of Masafer Yatta's inhabitants could go ahead. Israeli military activity in the area has increased since the court's decision in May 2022, leading to fears that demolitions are imminent. Israel's execution of this large-scale expulsion would amount to forcible transfer, which is a war crime and crime against humanity.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Brigadier General Fares Atila
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Office for the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories
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Dear Brigadier General Fares Atila,

*I am concerned about the forced displacement of **Jamila and Muhammad Abu Sabha, their family, and other Palestinian villagers** in the south of the West Bank in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). Nine villages in the area, known as Masafer Yatta, are at imminent risk of demolitions and their 1,150 inhabitants face forced displacement.*

The Israeli army said that it needed to conduct training in the area, and so declared it a "firing zone". The villagers appealed against this plan, because they have lived in Masafer Yatta for generations, and they need the space for raising livestock. However, the villagers have now exhausted their legal remedies since the Supreme Court rejected their request for a further hearing on 2 October. The demolition of homes, schools and roads is a violation of Masafer Yatta villagers' right to an adequate standard of living, including housing, under international human rights law.

In the region of Masafer Yatta, meanwhile, several Israeli settlements and outposts are expanding: Mitzpe Yair to the south, East Susya to the west, Avigayil, Havat Maon and Maon to the north. The settling of an occupying state's civilians in occupied territory and the forcible transfer of protected persons are serious violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes. These forcible transfers are carried out to maintain Israel's system of oppression and domination over Palestinians, and therefore also constitute the crime against humanity of apartheid.

I call on you to immediately halt all plans to demolish Palestinian homes and evict residents in Masafer Yatta, end Israeli settlement activity, and to stop forcible transfers of the Palestinian population in the occupied West Bank in general. Israel should also end other violations against Palestinians in the OPT, such as arbitrary restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of movement and residence in their communities, and on their rights to access livelihoods, healthcare services and education.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Masafer Yatta comprises of 19 villages and hamlets, of which nine are at imminent risk of demolition. The Israeli authorities have issued orders to demolish almost all homes, as well as animal shelters, cisterns, primary and secondary schools, and community infrastructure in Masafer Yatta villages al-Fakhit, al-Majaz, al-Markaz, Halawa, Jinba, Khallet al-Dab'a, Isfay al-Fawqa, Isfay al-Tahta, and al-Tabban, on the grounds that they were built without official permits in an area designated as a military zone. Building permits are, however, almost impossible to obtain for Palestinians in the context of a systematically discriminatory land and housing regime.

Since the Supreme Court's decision on 4 May 2022 that demolitions could proceed, the Israeli army's civil administration's bulldozers have demolished Jamila Abu Sabha's home twice, on 11 May 2022 and 1 June 2022. The army conducted tank manoeuvres next to her children's school in September 2022. She told Amnesty International that her youngest children, who are two, three and four years old, have become terrified since the demolitions. Jamila Abu Sabha, a cheese manufacturer and homemaker, had to rearrange her home-based artisan and caring work to fit in one tent. Photos of their home before the demolitions show a small, neat breeze-block house with herb pots. Muhammad Abu Sabha, who owns and cares for 200 sheep, has cleared and furnished a cave that was previously used for shepherding equipment, in order to accommodate his family in case the tent is demolished like the home before it. Their fourteen-year-old daughter Fatima, who studies in al-Fakhit's secondary school, showed the cave to Amnesty International researchers and commented: "I do not want to live in this."

On 23 November 2022, the civil administration's bulldozers demolished the primary school in Isfay al-Fawqa in the morning of a school day. The Israeli army had destroyed the few paved roads and water pipes connecting the villages in June 2021. The water pipes have since been repaired but remain at risk. Residents told Amnesty International on 14 October 2022 that new and unpredictable military checkpoints occasionally prevented teachers from reaching the five local schools (now four) in June and September 2022. On 15 July, an unexpected checkpoint by Halawa prevented Muhammad Ali Abu Aram, 62 years old, from reaching medical treatment for blood clotting for 10 hours, according to his nephews. The Israeli army repeatedly confiscated residents' and commuting teachers' vehicles, on the grounds that they entered a closed zone. Four vehicles belonging to teachers in Jinba's primary school and al-Fakhit's secondary school were confiscated in May 2022. The Jinba school bus, which serves children of 50 families, was confiscated at the start of the school year on 31 August 2022. On Saturday 8 October, the villagers in Khallet al-Dab'a organized a festival with children's performances, music and food stalls. Residents described to Amnesty International that they had decorated the village, prepared meals, and rehearsed activities; however only a dozen visitors attended because Israeli checkpoints had prevented access.

The Masafer Yatta villages are located in the South Hebron Hills in Area C of the occupied West Bank. Area C covers 60% of the West Bank, where the Israeli authorities retain exclusive control over planning and zoning. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, between 2018-2022, 4,323 Palestinian West Bank residents were forcibly evicted, and some 3,500 buildings demolished due to discriminatory zoning and planning in Area C. More than 5,000 other Palestinians are at imminent risk of forced eviction, particularly in Masafer Yatta and in the Jordan Valley's shepherding communities such as Humsa and Hadidiya. At the same time, Israeli authorities provided subsidies, tax incentives and low-cost utilities to encourage Jewish Israelis to live in 279 illegal settlements on roughly 40% of the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem), home to over 465,400 Israeli settlers, according to Israeli organization Peace Now's statistics. In 2018-2022, the Israeli government approved plans for building 10,294 housing units in Israeli settlements in Area C. In the same period and area, the Israeli government approved construction permits for just 27 Palestinian housing units, also according to Peace Now.

Israel has arbitrarily designated large areas of Palestinian land as military zones, state land, archaeological sites or national parks to maximize control over Palestinian land in both Israel and the OPT. A recent investigation into classified documents from 1979 revealed that Israel's creation of "firing zones" in the OPT that cover approximately 20% of the occupied West Bank, was "for the sole purpose of eventually handing the land over to Israeli settlers". These and other policies that violate international law form key elements of Israel's institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination of Palestinians.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Hebrew

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 18 January 2022

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Jamila Abu Sabha (she/her); Muhammad Abu Sabha (he/his)