

## HOPE UNDER THE RUBBLE: THE IMPACT OF ISRAEL'S DEMOLITION POLICY ON PALESTINIAN CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Homes are fundamental for children to grow, thrive, and feel protected. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children should 'grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness'<sup>1</sup>, and every child has the right to a safe place to live so they can develop in the best way.<sup>2</sup> As the Occupying Power, Israel has the duty to protect these rights.<sup>3</sup> However, since Israel's occupation of the West Bank in 1967, authorities, so far, have demolished an estimated 28,000 Palestinian homes,<sup>4</sup> displacing and forcibly transferring tens of thousands of children<sup>5</sup> thus impacting their lives in ways that substantially undermine their fundamental rights.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the rate of demolitions and displacement of Palestinians hit a four-year-high in 2020, and this concerning escalation looks set to continue.<sup>7</sup> In the first quarter of 2021, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 293 Palestinian-owned structures - this reflects **double** the number of demolitions and/or seizures for the same period the year prior.<sup>8</sup>

Behind each demolition, there is a family who lose their home, possessions, stability, livelihood, and access to services, with devastating consequences on their lives and futures. **Save the Children consulted 217 families across the West Bank to get a clearer understanding of the immediate and longer-term impact that demolitions have on their lives, and the lives of children in particular.** It is hoped that the findings will underscore the colossal impact of demolitions on families' lives and the urgent need for the Government of Israel to change its policy, and for the international community to use its influence in persuading it to do so, including through countermeasures for continued violations of international law.

The findings of the research show that beyond the initial trauma of losing their homes, the resulting dispossession and displacement cripple children's sense of safety, leads to severe emotional distress, and leaves them isolated from their friends and communities. In fact, most children (70%) reported feeling socially isolated and a majority of children (60%) felt that their education had been jeopardised or interrupted following the demolition.

Most (80%) children feel abandoned by the world and have lost faith in the ability of anyone to provide support and protect their rights – whether this was their parents, authorities, and even the international community –. As a result, many children reported feelings of powerlessness and disempowerment, which, in turn, takes a huge toll on how they feel about the future. 16-year-old Fadi said: “*Nobody stopped them*”

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<sup>1</sup> Preamble to the UNCRC, see <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Article 27

<sup>3</sup> Israel is bound by IHL as a party to the conflict, and as an occupying power it is bound more specifically by the sub-set of IHL rules that form the law of occupation. Since Israel exercises effective control over Palestinians' enjoyment of their human rights, it has extraterritorial human rights obligations towards Palestinians.

<sup>4</sup> See Diakonia <https://www.diakonia.se/en/IHL/where-we-work/Occupied-Palestinian-Territory/Administration-of-Occupation/House-Demolitions1/>

<sup>5</sup> According to OCHA, the number of displaced people from 2009 to 2021 is 11,000. According to [Badil](#), 64,343 people were displaced due to home demolitions between 1967 and 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Article 3 of the CRC obliges Israel to make the best interests of the child a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. Actions which deprive children of shelter and disrupt the family environment are not made with the best interests of the child as a primary consideration; Article 27 of the CRC protects children in terms of their standard of living and seeks to ensure that this standard is adequate with respect to the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

<sup>7</sup> OCHA, See <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-demolitions-and-displacement-march-2021>

<sup>8</sup> OCHA, See <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-demolitions-and-displacement-march-2021>

– or could stop them again - from destroying our home, our lives. So why should I bother to dream about a good future?”

Demolitions also take an enormous emotional toll on parents and caregivers, with most (76%) reporting that they feel unable to protect their children after losing their homes. Most (80%) families reported a devastating impact on their economic security, with more than a quarter losing their job post-demolition – and this is compounded by the spiralling cost of living.<sup>9</sup>

In most cases, the justification given for the destruction of homes is a lack of Israeli-issued building permits – through a planning system that has been described in the UN Secretary General’s report at the Human Rights Council as “restrictive, discriminatory and incompatible with requirements under international law”.<sup>10</sup>

The demolition of Palestinian homes, the expropriation of Palestinian land, and the resulting displacement and forcible transfer are not only illegal under international law<sup>11</sup> but are an obstacle to the fulfilment of children’s rights, including the right to a standard of living adequate for their development.<sup>12</sup> **Unless the international community makes it clear that it will hold the Government of Israel accountable for such violations, including through counter measures, homes and schools will continue to be torn down and children will pay the highest price.**

**As the Occupying Power, Israel has the duty to protect the rights of the protected persons, with special protection to children. Save the Children is calling on the Government of Israel to cancel all existing demolition orders for homes, schools and vital infrastructure.** Failing to do so will leave more children without a home or an education, adding to the impact the pandemic is already having on their day to day lives.

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<sup>9</sup> 61% of families consulted reported that the cost of living had increased following their home demolition.

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Council 34<sup>th</sup> session, Human Rights Situation in the oPt, Report of the Secretary-General <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/34/38>

<sup>11</sup> Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the destruction of property not justified by absolute military necessity; forcible transfer of the protected population is strictly prohibited under Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention; Article 49 also provides that the occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population in the territory it occupies.

<sup>12</sup> CRC Article 27