

MISSION OF THE
STATE OF PALESTINE
Dublin



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دولة فلسطين
دبلن

Ambassador

السفير

Foreign Affairs Committee to examine forced displacements and demolitions in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Tuesday- May 11th, 2021

Chair of the JCFAD
Senators and Deputies,
Guests,

I would like to extend my sincere thanks for this invite to appear before the committee to bear witness and give evidence on the issues of demolitions and forced displacement, settlers' violence against our people in the west bank and in particular, sheikh Jarrah and East Jerusalem neighbourhood as tensions further escalate, and Israeli settlers intensify their attacks against our civilians.

Before I commence, I would like to clarify our leadership's position to postpone and not to cancel the election. The Palestinian leadership announced on 29th of April that it will postpone the elections as Israel, the occupying power, refused to facilitate the elections (nominations, campaigning, and voting) in East Jerusalem regardless of the Oslo agreement signed in 1993 and as conducted in 1996 and 2006, where 6,12 polls/ballots respectively have been assigned in east Jerusalem and the elections went well. East Jerusalem is part of the occupied Palestinian territories and it is a key to holding the election. Palestinians there should have a right to vote and to make their voices heard. The importance of including East Jerusalemites in our democratic processes also was part of Cairo meetings understandings among the main Palestinian political factions.

The international community has responsibilities to keep the agreement fully respected and put pressure on Israel. Israel acts above the law and does not show respect not only to agreements signed but to all the effort made to bring a transparent and fair election in the OPT. We need a strong mandate from our people in order to realise their democratic wishes of a free Palestine.

My statement today before the committee is compatible with all our messages sent to the international community.... Our voice against the oppression and injustice in Palestine is united.

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The situation in Occupied Palestine continues to deteriorate as Israel intensifies its human rights violations and war crimes against our people. The occupying Power has escalated its appropriation of Palestinian homes, lands and properties seeking to accelerate the forced transfer of our people, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem, and its surroundings in a systematic, and deliberate plan to annex and ethnically cleanse it. East Jerusalem is an integral part of the State of Palestine.

The occupying Power is blatantly using unlawful measures to carry out systemic policies of forced displacement, including by use of its judiciary and applying settler-backed laws to occupied territory. These illegal actions are being carried out in countless ways every single day in grave breach of international humanitarian and criminal law and in violation of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), including the specific prohibitions on policies and measures aimed at altering the character, demographic composition and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem

Backed and encouraged by the government, Israeli occupying forces and settlers have ramped up their systemic, violent and racist attacks and incitement against Palestinians in ongoing attempts to entrench the occupation and *de facto* annexation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in East Jerusalem. These acts of aggression have become a nightly occurrence since the start of the holy month of Ramadan, with hundreds of Palestinians injured and arrested by Israeli occupying forces.

The massive deployment of occupation forces in and around Jerusalem's Old City, movement restrictions and violent attacks of worshippers at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the ongoing forcible expulsion campaigns against Palestinian families in sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods are the latest violations to add to Israel's long list of grave breaches of international law. In addition to these provocative measures, Palestinians in East Jerusalem are reeling from nights of organized incitement and terror by extremist groups and settlers that included violent marches through city by hundreds of them repeating anti-Palestinian slogans and threats, including

“Death to Arabs” and “we will burn down your villages”, we will slaughter you all you know we will kill you one by one”

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Prime minister of Israel provocatively tweeted yesterday:

I also say to our best friends:

Jerusalem is our capital and we will
continue to build in it!

**

Jerusalem has been the capital of
the Jewish people for thousands of
years. Our roots in Jerusalem date
back to the biblical period, and our
continuous connection to Jerusalem
has been preserved through all
generations

Adding to this, the extremist, far-right Knesset member, Itamar Ben Gvir, who has repeatedly called for the transfer of Palestinians and who has provocatively “set up his office” in the middle of Sheikh Jarrah to stake claim to the area, continues to incite a provocative attack against our people who came in solidarity with families of sheikh jarrah while Israeli settlers roam about freely intimidating and attacking civilians, including children, and vandalizing Palestinian homes and properties.

Background

Sheikh Jarrah is considered to be one of the most important Palestinian residential areas in occupied Jerusalem. It is located north of the Old City and covers an area of about 200 acres in which there are around 2,800 residents, some of whom are Palestinian families displaced during the Nakba (Catastrophe) of 1948.

The neighbourhood was built in 1956 under an agreement signed between the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and the Jordanian government — which controlled the occupied city at that time — represented by the Ministry of Construction and Development. The plan was to **accommodate 28 displaced** Palestinian families at the time.

The agreement provided for the payment of rent for a period of three years, after which the houses were handed to the residents. The leases expired in 1959, but after Israel's 1967 offensive and the occupation of what was left of Palestine, the colonial government prevented the Palestinian families from having ownership of the properties and land. Two Israeli committees attempted to falsify legal documents in 1972 and register the land to be officially at the disposal of the occupation government.

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In 1982, settlers' associations used the fake documents to demand that the Israeli courts should evict the Palestinians from their homes. The courts' deliberations continued between partial eviction and general postponement of the decisions until last month when the central court in Jerusalem ruled to reject the appeals submitted by the residents of Sheikh Jarrah and granted them a grace period between May and August to leave their homes.

Current events:

Palestinian families in Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhoods of occupied East Jerusalem remain at imminent risk of forced expulsion and mass dispossession after the Israeli Central Court in East Jerusalem approved a decision earlier this year to evict four Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in favour of a right-wing Israeli settlers' organization. No agreement has been reached as the Israeli judge suggested reaching a compromise. Our people rejected the surrendering of their rights and will never accept renting their own houses from the settlers who falsely claim their ownership before 1948. The Israeli "absentee law" allows Jewish Israelis only to claim properties but Palestinians are forbidden to claim the properties they were driven from the Nakba and in 1967.....(my dad has a house and land in Lod city). The HK of Jordan provided us with the legally signed contracts between the families and Jordanian ministry of construction in 1956 but these documents proving Palestinian ownership of the properties were disregarded by the Israeli courts, which work to institutionalise and entrench the colonial settlement enterprise.

The ruled eviction will bring about the forced displacement of around 180 members of combined families, who will then have their homes bulldozed to make way for an illegal settlement called "Shimon Hatzadik", along with a park for settlers under the name "King David Park."

The Jerusalemite families residing in Karm Al-Ja'ouni area in Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and Batn Al-Hawa neighbourhood in Silwan, have been persecuted for years in attempts by Israeli settler organisations, backed by the Israeli courts system, to expel these families and install illegal settlers in their homes.

Several families in the area have already been replaced by settlers, while another family has shared its home with settlers since they took over half of it in 2009.

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While settler groups enjoy the backing and service of Israeli courts and legislation for their unlawful plans, Palestinian families face relentless attacks designed to amass as much Palestinian land as possible, with as few Palestinian civilians as possible and to keep the occupation standing, highlighting the degree to which one group is heavily prioritized over another through a two-tier system built on discrimination and oppression.

The issue of sheikh jarrah reflects the determination of the occupying power to alter the legal, demographic and cultural status of the holy city of peace...sheikh jarrah is located mid-way among the Israeli neighbourhoods and it is a must for them to expel Palestinian residents to facilitate easy access to their own neighbourhoods without seeing any Arab Palestinians on their daily trip in and out of their neighbourhoods.

We know that we are not alone,

In January 2021, Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk warned the international community of the impact and agenda behind Israel's forced displacement campaign in Jerusalem. Mr. Lynk stressed, inter alia, ***"The forcibly expelled are not random but appear to be strategically focused on an area in East Jerusalem known as the Historic Basin. They seem to be aimed at clearing the way for the establishment of more illegal Israeli settlements in the area and physically segregating and fragmenting East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank."***

On [10 March 2021, the Palestinian Human Rights Organization Council](#) submitted a plea to the UN on behalf of the families. They highlighted forced eviction as a tool of Israel's coercive environment in East Jerusalem, through which it maintains its institutionalised regime of racial domination and oppression over the Palestinian people – a system of apartheid. Unlawfully applying Israeli domestic law to occupied territory, Israeli courts have ruled in favour of lawsuits undertaken by settler organisations to forcibly expelled the Palestinian families.

On 22 April 2021, representatives of 28 Palestinian families constituting approximately 500 Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah and 191 endorsing organizations, sent a letter to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), calling to urgently include the imminent forced displacement of Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah as part of the investigation on the Situation in the State of Palestine, with specific regard to war crimes and crimes against humanity, including forcible transfer, appropriation of property, persecution, apartheid, and other inhumane acts causing great suffering arising from their forced expulsion.

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Last week, Human Rights Watch report findings stated that the Israeli government has pursued an intent to maintain the domination of Jewish Israelis over Palestinians throughout the territory it controls. In the OPT, including East Jerusalem, that intent has been coupled with systematic oppression of Palestinians and inhumane acts committed against them. When these three elements occur together, they amount to the crime of **apartheid**.

In January this year, B'Tselem launched a report found *“In the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the Israeli regime implements laws, practices and state violence designed to cement the supremacy of one group – Jews – over another – Palestinians. A key method in pursuing this goal is engineering space differently for each group.”*

Their executive director said *“We are Israel's largest human rights group – and we are calling this apartheid”*. The report outlines in stark terms what Israel has implemented in the occupied territories – an apartheid state.

Demolition and displacement are an ongoing threat in Area C as well:

Demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian property continue in tandem with plans for settlement expansion. In the west Bank so far in 2021: [315 structures demolished](#) [468 Palestinians displaced](#). Meanwhile, in 2020 [12,159 Housing units were advanced through plans in 55 settlements](#). Yesterday, the Israel Likud party and PM Netanyahu was pushing for preliminary vote in the Knesset on a bill to legalize outposts in the west bank.

This year alone, 11 new illegal outposts have been set up on Palestinian stolen land.

Last month, EU ambassadors witnessed the demolitions of Palestinian properties funded by their taxpayer and only the Netherlands government took legal action. This sends a very clear message to our people: Israel acts with impunity as long as they are not held responsible, and accountability must be enforced if these actions are to cease.

In the month of February 2021 alone, the occupying Power demolished, forced people to demolish or seized 153 Palestinian properties, displacing 305 people, including 172 children and affecting the livelihoods of 435 other people. Such escalation has included the deliberate targeting by Israel of EU donated humanitarian aid, which **tripled** compared to the monthly average documented in 2020.

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This escalation reflects a **65%** increase from the monthly average of demolitions in 2020. The figures for March and April are even worsen. More families are under the threat of expulsion and home demolitions.

Before I conclude, I would like to say that Israel acts with impunity and it will continue to violate human rights and international law and abuse our people to reach what human rights watch and B'T Selem said - Jewish supremacy over Palestinian people.

It is not and should not be regarded as a religious battle, it is a political and human rights cause.

I raise those question to draw your attention to the plight of our people.

When would be the right time to recognise the state of Palestine?

When would you take decisive action to save the two-state solution?

When the blockade over Gaza will be removed

When will I and other Palestinians be able to visit al Aqsa and the church of Holy Sepulcher without the Israeli harassment?

When I will be able to visit my parents in Gaza without worrying where and how I should reach Gaza.

When will Palestinians be able to breath freely in their own land?

When will those who resist this occupation be free? When will our political prisoners be freed?

I am Palestinian and very proud.

I am Palestinian and deserve to live and my children who hold the Palestinian ID and passports have the right to aspire for freedom and to live in peace.

We deserve to live in peace and have our children grow up in peace.

Support and work for justice to prevail in Palestine.

We need your practical measures to hold Israel accountable.

Thank you.

Dr Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid, PhD

Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Ireland