



An Israeli military bulldozer demolishes a home in Kharbatha, near Ramallah, on April 1, 2004. PHOTO/ O. SILWADI

Designed by: Hanan Hamad, InterTech, Ramallah

### State of Israel

- Halt the demolition of Palestinian homes.
- Respect and apply to the OPT the principles of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and relevant Security Council resolutions.
- Ensure access to populations at risk and to people that have been displaced.

### Palestinian Authority

- Monitor and document the practice of house demolition in the OPT.
- Ensure necessary assistance for the victims of house demolitions, especially children, particularly providing psychological support and necessary referrals.

### The International Community

- Advocate for prevention of house demolitions in the OPT, through political pressure and support for legal intervention.
- Implement and mobilize funding for the inter-agency response to internal displacement in the OPT.

### Donor Governments

- Integrate support for the inter-agency response into funding strategies.
- Call upon Israel to adhere to its obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law vis-à-vis its house demolitions policy.

<sup>1</sup>Half a million Jews live in more than 100 settlements Israel has built in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, since it occupied the area in the 1967 war.

<sup>2</sup>"Affected" refers to people impacted by the demolition of a seasonal residence; such as the winter or summer residence of a Bedouin family.

<sup>3</sup>This data is compiled from reports produced by the Israel/OPT Working Group on Security Council Resolution 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict.



Credit: O. Damo

## Halting the Demolition of Homes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory



**Between 2000 and April 2009, over 10,000 homes were demolished in the occupied Palestinian territory – an average of 1,000 homes each year. The number of houses demolished in the first four months of 2009 was the highest of any full-year period in the history of the Israeli occupation.**

### House Demolitions: How They Impact Children and Families

'Broken Homes', a new study from Save the Children UK, the Palestinian Counselling Centre and the Welfare Association shows that the destruction of a home deals a devastating blow to children and their families. Families struggle with deteriorating social, financial, mental, and educational conditions, which can permanently damage the family structure. At present, these families are not included in any traditional humanitarian responses and fall through existing safety nets. They are left without coordinated support or an adequate response.

The study profiles 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 show 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 USD – well below absolute (deep) poverty lines and relative poverty lines (\$414 USD and \$518 USD respectively) for a family of six in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT).

## House Demolitions: The Big Picture

House demolitions have occurred since the start of the Israeli occupation in 1967. From 2000 through January 2009, 10,105 houses were demolished – a yearly average of 1,011 homes – according to the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions.

Saji, age 13, was 11 when her Bethlehem house was demolished. "We sat for an hour outside and it was really cold and I was afraid—very afraid. When I heard the sound of the demolition, I became fearful and angry. I started to cry. Then we went out and saw the apartment destroyed. I was sad afterward. My uncles helped us, supporting my father until we had rebuilt the house and moved back. But I regressed in my studies... I didn't like to talk to anyone because I didn't want any of them to ask me what happened."

Because of the recent offensive in Gaza during which 3,900 homes were destroyed, 2009 has witnessed by far the largest number of house demolitions since the start of the Israeli occupation.

However, the policy of demolishing Palestinian homes is part of a bigger picture: it is just one of many ways Palestinian families are forcibly displaced. Palestinian displacement began in 1948 when an estimated 800,000 Palestinians became refugees.

Today, Palestinian families and communities in the OPT are displaced when homes are demolished, while fleeing military operations, as a result of settlement expansion and settler violence<sup>1</sup>, the construction of the Separation Wall, military closures or evictions, and/or natural or human-made disasters.

In 2008, 1,151 Palestinians – including a confirmed 419 children and an additional estimated 194 children – were displaced or affected<sup>2</sup> by the demolition of 156 residential structures in the OPT.<sup>3</sup> Eighty-seven (or 55.7 percent) of these houses were located in East Jerusalem.

East Jerusalem residents, rural communities in the West Bank, Bedouin, refugees living in camps, communities in proximity to the Separation Wall, and areas near Gaza's borders are all at higher risk of displacement from house or building demolition. Some communities face demolition orders on every building in their village.

## A Bleak Future: The Implications of the Demolition of Palestinian Homes

How does house demolition impact Palestinian society, its social fabric, and demographic composition?

During the 22 days of Israel's war in Gaza at the start of 2009, an estimated 200,000 people, including 112,000 children, were temporarily displaced from their homes. The consequences were visible in both anecdotal accounts and humanitarian agency reports. Overcrowding among host families and shelters risked the spread of disease and poor nutrition. Conflicts over water and other resources became more prevalent. Domestic violence increased, and children of internally displaced families faced more obstacles in returning to school.

Today, some 3,900 families in Gaza remain homeless, their houses destroyed. These families are currently staying with host families, unable to rebuild their homes because of the lack of building materials due to the blockade. More study is needed to understand fully the long-term impact of these families' displacement.

In Silwan, Jerusalem, 150 structures have received demolition orders, threatening to displace more than 1,500 Palestinians. These families will have immediate and long-term humanitarian needs as they seek shelter, resources, education and psycho-social support.

These are examples of large-scale house demolitions in the OPT. However, consequences are similar – while less visible – when houses are destroyed gradually, one home at a time.

Without a coordinated advocacy and programmatic response by the diplomatic and aid community to the problem of house demolitions, Palestinians face increasing internal displacement and compounded socio-economic and mental health problems.

## What Can We Do? A UN-led Inter-agency Response

Until recently, the policy of demolishing homes was viewed as solely a political issue. While this study confirms the need for political solutions, it also demonstrates the importance of a coordinated humanitarian and protection response to house demolitions. While protection for internally displaced persons (IDPs) lies with the relevant national authority, in cases where that authority is unwilling or unable to offer the necessary protection, humanitarian and development agencies should respond. In such instances, no single UN agency is responsible for assisting IDPs. Instead an inter-agency response has been adopted whereby the agencies responsible for each cluster lead the response in that area.

An inter-agency response is advantageous because:

- It promotes a rights-based approach based on the internationally-recognised UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement;
- It ensures a professional response;
- It allows for systematic identification and information collection that can be used for advocacy and litigation purposes; and
- It reduces aid dependency.

## Recommendations

Save the Children UK, Welfare Association, and the Palestinian Counselling Centre call for the following steps to protect children and their families. (See 'Broken Homes' for the full list of recommendations.)

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement define internally displaced persons as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border." Although not a legal definition, nor binding, the Guiding Principles are based on international law.