



PRESS RELEASE

Humanitarian Coordinator calls on Israel to halt demolitions in the occupied West Bank immediately and to respect international law

Jerusalem, 17 February 2016

The Coordinator for Humanitarian and UN Development Activities for the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), Robert Piper, today called for an immediate halt to the destruction of Palestinian-owned property in the occupied West Bank and for respect for international law.

“The number of demolitions for just the first six weeks of 2016 is greatly alarming,” said Mr. Piper. “Over 400 Palestinians have been displaced from their homes - equivalent to over half the total number of Palestinians displaced in all of 2015.”

Between 1 January and 15 February 2016, Israeli forces destroyed, dismantled or confiscated 283 homes and other structures, displacing 404 Palestinians, including 219 children, and affecting another 1,150 Palestinians, who lost structures related to their source of income. Over 100 of the demolished structures were already provided as humanitarian assistance to families in need, often in the wake of an earlier demolition. These incidents occurred in 41 Palestinian locations, many in Palestinian Bedouin or herder communities in Area C.

“Most of the demolitions in the West Bank take place on the spurious legal grounds that Palestinians do not possess building permits,” said Mr. Piper, “but, in Area C, official Israeli figures indicate only 1.5 per cent of Palestinian permit applications are approved in any case. So what legal options are left for a law-abiding Palestinian?”

The UN Secretary-General has noted that the Israeli zoning and planning policy in the West Bank is restrictive and discriminatory. Under international humanitarian law, the destruction of property in an occupied territory is also prohibited unless absolutely necessary for military operations.

“International law is clear - Palestinians in the West Bank have the right to adequate housing and the right to receive humanitarian assistance,” said Mr. Piper. “As the occupying power, Israel is obliged to respect these rights.”

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For more information, please contact Mr. Ofir Feuerstein, +972 (0) 54 33 11 836.