

Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt): Flash Update #3

Humsa - Al Bqai'a

as of 16 February 2021

- On 16 February, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) confiscated five donor-funded livelihood tents in the Bedouin community of Humsa – Al Bqai'a, in the northern Jordan Valley. The tents were being assembled to provide shelter to the community and their livestock. Over the first weeks of February the community has had 62 structures demolished in three incidents, leaving 60 people, including 35 children were displaced, placing them now at imminent risk of forcible transfer. On 12 February, Palestinians gathered at Humsa – Al Bqai'a to show solidarity with the community which eventually led to clashes with Israeli forces, resulting in 30 teargas inhalation injuries which were treated on site.
- The community's vulnerability is compounded by expected severe winter conditions and by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The community's main needs are for protection, adequate shelter and shelter for their livestock. Due to the heavy military presence and fear of further confiscation/interception of aid, other partners have also chosen to deliver assistance in nearby communities, which Humsa – Al Bqai'a community members can access.
- Since the start of 2021, the Israeli authorities have demolished, seized or forced people to demolish at least 197 Palestinian- owned structures, including 77 donor-funded, displacing over 280 people, including some 150 children. This represents an over 200 per cent increase in structures targeted, and an over 500 per cent increase in donor-funded structures targeted, compared to the equivalent period in 2020.
- The humanitarian field team is continuing to assess the needs of the community. However, to prevent further confiscations and place the community at greater risk, the support of the broader international community is critical, to ensure the Israeli authorities guarantee humanitarian access to provide assistance to people in need.



For more on the general and legal background, please see [Flash Update #1](#).

Demolitions, displacement and the risk of forcible transfer

International humanitarian law (IHL) requires an occupying power to protect the population of the territory that it occupies, ensure its welfare and wellbeing, as well as the respect for its human rights. Any destruction of property by the occupying power is prohibited, except when rendered absolutely necessary by military operations, which is not relevant in the West Bank where there are currently no active hostilities. The extensive demolition of property is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and may amount to a war crime. Other than for the security of the population or imperative military reasons, IHL further prohibits the transfer of the population of an occupied territory without the genuinely and fully informed consent of the affected people, regardless of the motive. Consent is not considered genuine in an environment marked by the use, or threat, of physical force, coercion, fear of violence or duress. In the absence of such consent, the transfer is forcible and constitutes a breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE & ONGOING NEEDS

Following the demolition on 1 February 2021, an initial distribution of emergency shelters, food and essential household items was delivered by humanitarian partners, some of which was confiscated or damaged by Israeli forces on 3 February. A further assessment was undertaken by the humanitarian field team on 4 February, following which very basic emergency shelters, food and some essential household items were again provided, in addition to some cash assistance.

On 8 February, two of the consortium funded structures were confiscated, along with other emergency shelters provided by the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS). PRCS managed to provide five emergency shelters on the night of 8 February, but outside of the demolition site itself, to avoid further confiscation. On the night of 14 February, PRCS provided an additional five tents to those members of the community lacking emergency shelter.



Ongoing Needs and Response:

- **Protection:** In addition to the trauma from repeated demolitions and the risk of further displacement, community members are experiencing high stress levels due to a lack of basic needs. Protection partners have been providing psychosocial support to the community, including the children, since the November 2020 demolition. A Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support Services (MHPSS)/Child protection assessment is being undertaken this week to ensure long-term support for children and their caregivers, dependent on their ability to access the site safely.

- **Shelter & Non-Food Items**: While shelter partners have managed to deliver emergency shelters, a more durable shelter response is needed in the form of residential tents. All of the community's animal shelters and storage units for fodder and related materials have also been demolished or confiscated, so livelihood replacements are also needed. On 16 February, a humanitarian partner succeeded in delivering 60 tons of fodder.
- **WASH**: Although 20 water tanks were provided after the demolition on 3 November 2020, water vendors are reluctant to enter the area to refill these tanks, due to their fear of arrest or confiscation of vehicles. The WASH cluster is assessing alternative options of water delivery. Emergency hygiene kits, including dignity kits, have been delivered to the community by partners.
- **Health**: Currently, no specific health needs have been identified; PRCS, and the health cluster, in general, stands ready to assist. The ongoing demolitions are taking place in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of adequate shelter is impeding the necessity for social distancing and other recommended safety measures.
- **Education**: There is no primary or secondary school located within the community; the ongoing demolitions have disrupted the children's attendance at the nearest school. Education needs are being assessed as part of the child protection assessment, and the Education Cluster is ready to respond, as needed.