

New OCHA report highlights the plight of Palestinians in Area C forced to leave their homes

TODAY, 1 August 2011, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) launched a new report *Displacement and Insecurity in Area C of the West Bank*. This report focuses on displacement of Palestinian civilians in Area C, an area that represents over 60 percent of the West Bank where Israel retains control over security, planning and building.

Acting UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, said, "This new report, based on field visits to 13 communities in Area C, found that in most of these communities Palestinian families are being forced to leave due to the restrictive policies and practices of the Israeli authorities, including movement and access restrictions, settlement activity, and restrictions on Palestinian construction, along with insufficient law enforcement on violent settlers. All of this is increasing the vulnerability of these communities"

According to OCHA's new report, residents in these communities face numerous challenges. They are unable to build and develop their communities due to restrictive and discriminatory planning policies, while neighbouring Israeli settlements expand. Palestinian families have difficulty accessing water, grazing or agricultural land, and even basic services, due to movement restrictions and lack of infrastructure. Violence and harassment from Israeli settlers is a constant in their lives. Communities consistently reported that Israeli settlements are central to the hardships they are encountering.

"Irrespective of the motivation behind the various policies applied by Israel to Area C," Rajasingham continued, "their effect is to make development impossible for many Palestinian communities. Communities live in a state of pervasive insecurity and daily life has deteriorated to such an extent that some residents are forced to leave in order to meet their basic needs, feed their families or educate their children. This pattern of displacement, along with ongoing Israeli settlement activity, undermines the ability of Palestinian communities to maintain their presence in Area C and raises concerns about demographic shifts and changes to the ethnic make-up of Area C."

It is estimated that 150,000 Palestinians reside in Area C, which contains the most significant land reserves available for Palestinian development, as well as the bulk of Palestinian agricultural and grazing land. It is the only contiguous territory in the West Bank. At the same time, 300,000 Israeli settlers live in approximately 135 Israeli settlements and 100 settlement outposts in Area C, with the settler population growing at a significantly faster pace than in Israel.

This new OCHA report is based on field visits to a geographically diverse group of residents in Area C, representing sedentary villages, and Bedouin and other herding communities, as well as refugee and non-refugee populations.

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OCHA calls on the Government of Israel, among other measures, to end the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians in the oPt, including immediately ceasing demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures, until Palestinians have access to a fair and non-discriminatory zoning and planning regime.

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Link: http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_area_c_report_august_2011_english.pdf

NOTES FOR THE EDITOR

- In the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation agreed to the temporary division of the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) into three areas, A, B and C. In Area, C, Israel retained full control over security, planning and zoning. This division was intended to last no more than five years. There have been no additional changes to this division since the breakdown of negotiations in 2000.

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