

Rubble and dust: How EU keeps failing Palestinians

- By Hagai El-Ad, euobserver.com

All over the occupied West Bank, one can practically taste the dust in the air: since January 2016 some 300 Palestinians [homes and structures have been bulldozed by Israeli authorities](#). Hundreds have lost their homes to such demolitions, more than half of them children.

This cruelty is not random: it is part of a broader strategy by Israel to push Palestinians out of parts of their homeland and further fragment their lands. The aim is to consolidate Israeli control while making room for the further expansion of Israeli settlements.

The occupation wields the power of a planning regime that cites a hodgepodge of excuses couched in legalese to designate as illegal virtually any Palestinian construction, thereby providing a guise of legality for green-lighting Israeli settlements while bulldozing Palestinian hamlets.

None of this is new. Waves of demolitions come and go, rising and ebbing with the tides of international attention, but never quite stopping. Yet the current wave of demolitions is unique in some ways.

First, in scale: in the first few months of 2016, Israel has already demolished more Palestinian homes than in all of 2015.

Second, in the increased targeting of projects donated to Palestinian communities by the EU and its member states, which include humanitarian aid such as solar panels that provide electricity when Israel prevents hookups to nearby power grids, water cisterns, a pre-fab for a classroom, and basic shelters.

Oddly enough Israel claims that these solar panels and water cisterns, built on land it has occupied since 1967, “undermine its sovereignty”.

In September 2015, the EU initiated a so called ‘structured dialogue’ with Israel, aimed at bringing an end to the demolitions within six months.

No European impact

The EU and its member states also committed to claiming financial compensation from Israel for European-funded projects if the effort failed. Yet far from being halted, demolitions were dramatically stepped up during this period of supposed “dialogue”.

The six months were up more than a month ago. Clearly, the only thing that was structured during this ‘structured dialogue’ was the apparent specific targeting of EU-funded structures. So that even in the bulldozed rubble of an EU-funded playground for Palestinian children one can find some structure – that of the outlines of an Israeli strategy to forcefully displace Palestinians within the occupied territory.

This outrage must not be allowed to go on. The fact that so much of what is being destroyed is funded by European donors only adds insult to injury, with the core issue remaining the loss of human shelter, of people's homes.

If allowed to continue, thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank – not “mere” hundreds – will lose their homes this year.

What would you call a regime that systematically destroys or confiscates even first aid response, such as tents for families to shelter in? What impact should these actions by a friendly government have on diplomatic and economic relations?

The European answer to date has been: no impact at all. True, statements condemning demolitions have taken an increasingly clearer tone of late, but the bottom line remains the same: statements alone, absent of action, continue to serve as an implicit green light for Israel to proceed unchecked. And Israel does.

The choice is clear

While Israel continues demolishing Palestinian homes, Europe continues to fail Palestinian children, families, and communities, as well as its own people, the true contributors of many of these demolished projects.

This is an urgent plea to take action and make a difference. It is hardly likely that steps such as demanding compensation and making public the cost of demolished donor-structures will be sufficient to bring the demolitions to a halt, but at this stage it is not clear if even such basic measures will be enacted.

The structured dialogue is over, and to no avail. Six months have been wasted – well, not entirely: Israel has used the time well, to further advance its structured demolitions. Amongst the rubble, words have lost their meaning.

The choice is clear: will Europe continue to provide Israel with the go-ahead for further violations of international humanitarian law and a policy of forced displacement? Too much rubble has already settled on the ground, too much dust already clouds the future. The time for words has long passed: it is time to, finally, take action.

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