

Six years after Gaza war, Palestinian victims lament housing crisis

Fri, 2020-07-24 23:15

BEIT LAHIA/GAZA STRIP: Six years have passed since the last bloody war on the Gaza Strip, but Palestinian Saber Abu Nahl is still moving from one house to another after he lost his home to Israeli airstrikes in the northern Al-Nada neighborhood.

Abu Nahl, who works as a taxi driver, was one of hundreds who lost their homes during the conflict.

He dreams of rebuilding his home again.

"The rent fees overwhelmed me and I dream day and night to go back to home," said Abu Nahl, 43.

The war launched by Israel against Gaza, which lasted from July 8 till Aug. 26, 2014, destroyed 12,000 housing units and partially destroyed 160,000, of which 6,600 were uninhabitable, according to the Ministry of Works and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), in cooperation with the UN Development Program.

More than 1,500 housing units are yet to be rebuilt and their owners are homeless, according to the non-governmental organization People's Committee to Face the Siege.

Abu Nahl, who supports a family of seven, lives in a modest rental home in Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. The former owner of the house forced him to leave because he could not pay the estimated monthly rent of \$117.

Like other homeowners ruined by the war, Abu Nahl was receiving financial aid from the UNRWA as an allowance for the value of rent until they returned to their homes after reconstruction.

However, UNRWA has stopped paying the allowance since 2018. Abu Nahl disagreed with the decision and accused Palestinian forces of breaking promises.

"The UNRWA is lying, the Palestinian factions do not care about us and we are homeless without any horizon," he said.

"Many days I return to my children with not enough to feed them, so how do I manage their affairs and pay the rent in light of a devastating economic situation?"

Since the 2014 conflict, the Gaza Strip has endured fighting between Hamas and other factions, and Israel.

Nevin Barakat is no better off than Abu Nahl, and despite receiving a new apartment at the beginning of the year, she still feels the painful effects of the war, where she lost her home.

The Al-Nada neighborhood apartment was destroyed, and Barakat, her husband Rami, and her five children took refuge in a school shelter. But an Israeli artillery shell hit the classroom where she was staying, killing her husband and wounding her children.

Although she was happy to move her children to the new apartment, the “ghosts of war” still affect Barakat, who fears another war could displace them again.

“I lost my husband at the age of 37. I want to live in peace and raise my children.” she said.

Osama Drabieh, a member of the destroyed homeowners’ committee in the Al-Nada neighborhood, said: “It is true that most destroyed homes in the neighborhood have been rebuilt, but residents are afraid a new war will bring back the suffering.”

Drabieh, a retired civil servant, returned to his new apartment at the beginning of the year after six long years of separation from his family.

“We have suffered a lot from the burden of destroyed housing and we cannot tolerate any new war that will destroy what has been rebuilt,” he said.

“The impact of the previous war is still visible on our bodies, homes, factories and streets.”

Jamal Al-Khudari, head of the People’s Committee to Face the Siege, said that more than 1,500 housing units have still not been rebuilt after the 2014 war.

More than 500 factories were also severely damaged during the fighting, he said.

“The reality in the Gaza Strip remains difficult, exceptional and tragic,” Al-Khudari said.

Six years after the war, life on the Gaza Strip faces the growing threats of a deteriorating economy, poverty and unprecedented unemployment rates.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[gaza city](#)

Social media users demand 'Palestine' added to Google Maps
Young Gaza amputees play soccer again after coronavirus curbs eased

[International plea to save storm-hit Yemeni mud city from collapse](#)

Fri, 2020-07-24 22:25

AL-MUKALLA: Authorities in southeastern Yemen have called for international help to save the historic mud-skyscraper city of Shibam from collapse after heavy rains damaged more than 100 homes.

Dubbed the "Manhattan of the Desert," the 16th-century walled city in the province of Hadramout is the oldest metropolis in the world to use vertical construction.

However, torrential rain on Monday partially destroyed some of the UNESCO World Heritage Site's 500 high-rise properties forcing many families out of their homes and to seek refuge with neighbors or relatives.

During a meeting in the city of Seiyun on Thursday, local authorities in the

region agreed to set up an emergency committee to assess the damage to Shibam and surrounding areas. At the same time officials appealed for financial aid from UNESCO and other international and local funding bodies to help with repair and reconstruction costs.

Alawi Bin Sumait, a journalist and resident of Shibam, told Arab News: "The rains were huge and lasted from 5:30 p.m. to nearly 10 p.m." He said the deluge overwhelmed streets, sewage systems, and power lines, and he and his son Abdullah posted images on social media showing huge cracks that had formed in some of the mud buildings.

He urged the Yemeni government to urgently allocate emergency funds toward repairing damaged houses before they crumbled.

BACKGROUND

Local authorities in the region agreed to set up an emergency committee to assess the damage to Shibam World Heritage site and surrounding areas, located in Wadi Hadramout, after torrential rains partially destroyed some of the properties.

Shibam has been deprived of vital maintenance since the beginning of the war in Yemen which had resulted in international NGOs and experts leaving the country. Even before the recent heavy rains, many properties in the clustered city were already on the verge of collapse, Bin Sumait said.

With meteorologists forecasting further rainstorms over the coming days in Shibam, and central and western parts of Yemen, local government official Hesham Al-Souaidi warned that current relief efforts could be hampered.

"This year's rainstorms are consecutive and do not leave time for us to assess the actual damage and to offer assistance. As we move to fix the damage, another downpour hits the same areas and things get worse," Al-Souaidi said.

On Thursday, local authorities in the central Yemeni province of Marib said that storms on Tuesday killed three internally displaced people and damaged the shelters of more than 5,000 families in five districts. Thousands of families there are in desperate need of food, shelter, clean drinking water, and medication.

Heavy rains have lashed many Yemeni provinces since the beginning of the year, causing dozens of deaths, flooding farms, and swamping water and electricity stations.





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Yemen](#)

[Shibam](#)

Yemen parliament speaker highlights importance of implementing Riyadh Agreement
Yemen currency crash has 'done more damage' than war, experts say

[Yemen currency crash has 'done more damage' than war, experts say](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-07-24 01:18

AL-MUKALLA: The depreciation of the Yemeni currency has caused more damage to Yemenis than the raging conflict in the country, economists and locals have said.

The Yemeni riyal traded 752 against the US dollar on Thursday's black market for the first time in two years, falling from 700 in recent weeks. The riyal was 623 at the beginning of the year before slowly falling to 680 over the following six months. In January 2015, the riyal was 215 to one dollar.

The impact of the currency depreciation on the Yemeni economy and the public is dramatic, experts and economists said.

"The direct violence of the war has affected some people in Yemen, but the fall of the currency affects everyone," Spencer Osberg, chief editor at the Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies, told Arab News.

"Yemen imports the vast majority of what its people consume. The domestic currency losing value has an immediate inflationary impact, meaning the necessities of life become more expensive for everyone," he added.

Yemen was plunged into war when Houthi rebels seized control of Sanaa and gained territory across the country in late 2014, triggering heavy fighting that ravaged vital institutions. After almost five years, the Yemeni government has liberated most of the country. The focus of the fighting has moved to rugged and uninhabited areas in northern Yemen.

The war has disrupted oil and gas exports, the primary source of hard currency for the country. The disruption is the main cause in the decline of the Yemeni currency.

"In a country where roughly half of the population was living below or near the poverty line even before the conflict when the currency was stable, the Yemeni riyal's fall in value in recent years has made the cost of staying alive far harder to afford for millions more people," Osberg said.

When the riyal began to fall, local authorities in several Yemeni provinces raised fuel prices. The price of food increased by 10 percent, triggering limited protests in government-controlled areas. Many local food wholesalers only accept the Saudi riyal or US dollar.

Mohammed Omer, who owns a small grocery in Al-Mukalla, told Arab News that he is forced to buy the Saudi riyal at an inflated price from local exchange companies in order to buy goods from wholesalers.

"I sometimes frantically move from one exchange company to another when the Saudi riyal is scarce," he said, adding that he, like all local traders, raised the prices of goods to offset losses caused by the fluctuation of the currency.

Saleh Yaslem, a local journalist, said his landlord asked for rent in Saudi riyals. Yaslem is paying SR600 monthly for a new flat, compared with 50,000 Yemeni riyals (SR256) for his old flat last year.

"This is a big problem for Yemenis whose salaries are in the Yemeni riyal," he told Arab News.

Economists said the scarcity of Yemen's main sources of foreign currencies has also caused the depreciation.

"Remittances, international humanitarian aid and bilateral support from Saudi Arabia are all decreasing dramatically while the Yemeni government has been printing new riyals to cover its operating budget, largely to pay public sector salaries," Osberg said, adding that high demand for hard currency from fuel and goods traders has also contributed to the problem.

Mustafa Nasr, director of the Economic Media Center, said the Yemeni government's failure to secure a new central bank deposit from Saudi Arabia, the civil war, currency speculators and a surplus of Yemeni riyals are the main reasons behind the depreciation.

"The rapid slump in the riyal is a disastrous issue that reflects the instability in the country," he said.

To curb depreciation, the government should reassert control of the market, inject more hard currencies into the market, convince donors to bail out the economy, and resume oil and gas exports, experts said.

"Find ways to supply the market with foreign currency. This would require the cooperation of international stakeholders however, such as donor countries and humanitarian organizations recommitting to aid financing in Yemen," Osberg said. He advised the government to create a more stable and secure environment for the central bank in Aden to operate by ending tension with the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC).

"Neither Saudi Arabia nor any other international donor is likely to give the central bank access to billions of dollars when its head office is surrounded by fighters and the government has lost Aden to the STC. The government badly needs to give stakeholders confidence that it can be responsible for any financial support it is given," he added.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Yemen](#)

Yemen's prime minister accuses Qatar of supporting HouthisEgypt to increase medical scholarship programs for Yemeni nationals

Lawyers seek justice from Council of Europe for Demirtas case

Author:

Fri, 2020-07-24 01:05

ANKARA: Turkey's refusal to implement the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has pushed lawyers of Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtas to take the case to the country's top court.

One of his lawyers also filed an application to the Council of Europe ministers' committee at the same time.

Demirtas, the former co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), has been imprisoned since Nov. 4, 2016.

The ECHR ruled that the Kurdish politician's rights were violated after he was given a 10-month prison sentence for his remarks on the Kurdish Roj TV show in 2005 during his Diyarbakir chairmanship of the left-wing Human Rights Association.

He was accused of making terror propaganda for this speech. The European court ruled its member country Turkey should pay compensation to Demirtas for the violation of his freedom of expression.

But the Turkish court rejected all requests for a retrial and acquittal, saying there was no need for it and ignored the ECHR ruling.

A continued non-execution of the rulings of the ECHR is considered a challenge to the court's authority, and according to Article 46 of the European Convention on Human Rights, contracting parties must abide by the rulings of the court to which they are parties. Otherwise they can face fines from the court, while the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is able to decide to monitor the country in question.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) recently sent a joint letter to EU ministers calling on them to address rights concerns in Turkey and enforce "the European Court of Human Rights' rulings that Osman Kavala and Selahattin Demirtas should be immediately released from their prolonged and arbitrary detention."

Demirtas, who is taking regular medication for a heart condition, was excluded from a recent law adopted in April 2020 where about 90,000 prisoners, including those with chronic diseases, were released from overcrowded prisons in Turkey.

HRW Turkey Director Emma Sinclair-Webb said that this was a tale of craftiness by Turkey, with its deeply politicized justice system, versus the

slowness of the European court.

“It has been over ten months since the grand chamber of the European court held a hearing to examine Demirtas’s case, and disappointingly the court still hasn’t issued its verdict,” she told Arab News. “That grand chamber hearing followed a ruling in 2018 where the European court found that by keeping Demirtas jailed, Turkey was ‘stifling pluralism and limiting freedom of political debate,’ the very core of the concept of a democratic society.”

Sinclair-Webb noted that it was a very important ruling – the first to say that Turkey uses prolonged detention in a politically motivated way and that it should immediately release Demirtas.

According to Sinclair-Webb, Turkey’s conduct during the affair proves the European court right, as at every stage of the process Turkey has found excuses not to implement the ruling and release Demirtas.

“First the Turkish authorities said “the decision isn’t final, we are waiting for the grand chamber decision.” Then they said, “Oh now we are holding him in relation to a new investigation,” and I would expect that they will argue when it finally comes that the grand chamber decision doesn’t apply. We have seen exactly the same playbook in relation to human rights defender Osman Kavala,” she said.

As the charge on which Demirtas is currently held relates to evidence for which he is already on trial and in the scope of which he was released from detention, Sinclair-Webb said there was therefore no ground to hold him in pretrial detention.

“It is a cynical and politically motivated decision to keep him locked up, has nothing to do with law, and once again completely discredits the justice system,” she said.

Demirtas is kept behind bars over terror charges and faces a sentence of up to 142 years. He is now being held in relation to protests in the Kurdish-majority southeastern provinces of Turkey in October 2014, despite not being named as a suspect in that investigation.

The Council of Europe, a human rights organization of which Turkey is a founding member, cannot issue an official verdict on a case until all avenues of the domestic judicial system in Turkey have been exhausted.

Mesut Bestas, one of Demirtas’s lawyers who lodged the application with the Council of Europe, is still hopeful for the leverage of the European top court on the Turkish Constitutional Court to revise the Demirtas decision.

“Although we cannot foresee how long it will take for the constitutional court and the ECHR to announce their ruling, it is a simple application under normal conditions and there are several case laws in this matter. I’m sure the Turkish Constitutional Court will revise the mistake made by the local court,” he told Arab News.

In the meantime, the Turkish Constitutional Court of Turkey ordered in late

June the release of Demirtas and ruled that his right to liberty had been violated because his detention had exceeded “a reasonable time.” It ordered that compensation of 50,000 Turkish lira (\$7,289) be paid to the Kurdish leader.

“We assume that Turkey will not burn all the bridges with the law. Otherwise none of us will have the guarantee to live under legal assurances,” Bestas said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[Selahattin Demirtas](#)

Top court orders release of Kurdish opposition leader in blow to Erdogan
Kurdish leader sent back to prison despite health fears

[Dangers threatening Egypt on July revolution anniversary, El-Sisi says](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-07-24 00:39

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi addressed the Egyptian people in a statement marking the 68th anniversary of the July 1952 Revolution, stressing that “time has demonstrated the nobility of the goals of the

revolution.”

El-Sisi extended his “sincere greetings to the symbol of the revolution” – former Egyptian presidents Mohamed Naguib and Gamal Abdel-Nasser.

“The days and years pass carrying events and memories that remain glued in the minds of the people . . . generation after generation and the history of Egypt abound in the glories of those events that we use as inspiration. July 23 1952 remains one of the most important days of our glory and one of the most prominent moments of our pride. As the 68th anniversary of this glorious revolution arrives, we recall our people’s struggle for freedom,” the president said.

“Our celebration of the glorious July revolution has always been an occasion in which we derive determination to achieve the aspirations of our people and their hopes for a bright future for themselves and for future generations, those generations who have the right to live a decent life in a secure, stable and prosperous country,” he said.

“In the spirit of the July Revolution and its goals, the country is continuing to implement a comprehensive strategic vision and unique development to build a strong and advanced homeland in all fields by setting up major national projects in all parts of the country and promoting work values and modern science and its approaches in all aspects of our lives. All this with the aim to help the Egyptian face challenges and take from his ancient legacy as a starting point toward achieving everything that he aspires to in the shortest possible time,” the president said.

“Just as the generation of the July revolution was on a date with destiny, God has determined that this generation face challenges that Egypt has not gone through in its recent history. The threats to our national security make us more eager to possess the comprehensive and influential ability to preserve the rights of the people.

“You may be aware of the extreme dangers of high sensitivity currently surrounding the country and requiring that all Egyptians be confident in their abilities to pass through crises in a way that preserves Egypt’s security and guarantees Egyptians their right to life in a stable homeland and a nation that seeks to value cooperation, construction and peace which are the basis for human relations among all peoples.”

Al-Azhar, Islam’s seat of learning, and the church also issued two separate statements in celebration of the July revolution, highlighting the need to confront the threats facing Egypt’s national security.

Al-Azhar Grand Imam Ahmed El-Tayeb stressed the need to be aware of the challenges facing Egypt and join hands for the sake of the nation, and to put the nation’s interest above any individual interest.

El-Tayeb praised Egypt’s constant concern for peaceful solutions as a firm doctrine of the Egyptian armed forces, asking God to protect Egypt, Libya and the Arab nation from all harm.

Egyptian churches in their various denominations declared their support for the Egyptian state, the political leadership and the armed forces in facing the challenges facing the region to preserve the state. The General Milli Council and the Coptic Endowments Authority of the Orthodox Church issued a statement declaring their support for El-Sisi's position in support of the Libyan people and their struggle against the "Turkish colonizer."

"Members and deputies of the General Council and the Coptic Endowments Authority support the courageous stance taken by President El-Sisi to support the Libyan people in their struggle against the Turkish colonizer and to protect the borders of Western Egypt. At the same time, they pray for the safety of each of the brave soldiers of Egypt's army, and never forget how the Egyptian army took revenge on the martyrs of the Egyptian Copts who were martyred by the terrorist groups in Libya," the churches' statement said.

A number of political experts stressed the issue of unification of all state bodies in the face of the dangers posed to Egyptians.

"Ethiopia and Libya are two sides of the same coin, and two issues that are equally important for Egypt," political expert Hani Assal said.

"There is no priority for one issue over the other. The first is a water security issue, the second is a border security issue and the two are national security issues, a struggle for survival, and life or death for Egypt and its people," Assal said.

Assal said that there was no difference "between those who plan to kill Egyptians hoping to gain control of the south, and those who plan to kill them with weapons from the side of the Islamic State."

"Those who assume that we have to fear and that war is difficult must remember that we have been in war since 2011, and that thousands of martyrs, both military and civilian, have already fallen and we are ready to provide more, rather than give up our rights," Assal said.

"(Egypt will remain) in between wars, threats, conflicts and conspiracies forever, and we will remain a joint force, and we will come out of all of this safe and secure, God willing, and modern and far back history attests to that," Al-Ahram writer Hagar Salah said.

"We will continue to back up our leaders and our army and keep our trust in them, and have them depend on us. We do not fear wars, nor are we shaken by psychological wars, nor provocations, frustrations, conspiracies or betrayals," Salah said.

Egypt is currently facing a two-pronged foreign policy crisis. Egypt fears Ethiopia's Renaissance dam will greatly reduce its access to water. In neighboring Libya, forces loyal to the Government of National Accord (GNA), who are supported by Turkey, are reportedly planning to launch an attack on the port city of Sirte and Al-Jufra, which El-Sisi has called "red lines" in terms of Egypt's security.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

Egypt's El-Sisi extends state of emergency of 2017 for another 3 months
Egypt's El-Sisi wishes Saudi Arabia's King Salman a speedy recovery