

Heads of Mission and representatives of West Bank Protection Consortium member states and likeminded countries visit Humsa Al Bqai'a and Ras Al Tin

Following Israeli mass demolition of Palestinian homes: Heads of Mission and representatives of West Bank Protection Consortium member states and likeminded countries visit Humsa Al Bqai'a and Ras Al Tin.

Heads of Mission and representatives from Belgium, Denmark, EU, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom, visited the Humsa Al Bqai'a community near Tubas in the Jordan Valley and Ras Al Tin in the central West Bank. The visit followed the demolition of 30 residential, sanitation and livelihood structures by Israeli forces in Humsa Al Bqai'a that left 42 people including 24 children homeless, for the seventh time since last November. The UN has said that attempts made to relocate the community put the members at risk of forcible transfer. In Ras Al Tin UN has assessed that 84 people including 14 women and 53 children lost their homes.

British Consul General Diane Corner said: "The repeated demolition of donor-funded homes and structures in Humsa Al Bqai'a by Israeli forces are a serious concern. Such demolitions cause unnecessary suffering to vulnerable Palestinians. It is particularly troubling to see very young children without shelter. I urge the Israeli authorities to cease such actions."

During the visit, diplomats met residents, WBPC partners, as well as representatives of civil society organisations active in the community. Local residents briefed the diplomats on recent events, and the impact of the destruction and confiscation of residential, livelihood and sanitation facilities, by Israeli forces. Many of the demolished structures were funded by the WBPC, the EU, other European and donor countries.

Recent demolitions and confiscations in Humsa come at a time when a number of other communities are facing the threat of eviction and demolition orders. Last week saw another gravely concerning instance of mass demolition and confiscation, in Ras al Tin in the central West Bank, also visited by the heads of mission today, where the UN assess that 84 people including 14 women and 53 children lost their homes.

So far in 2021, the Israeli authorities have demolished, seized or forced Palestinians to demolish at least 474 Palestinian-owned structures, including 150 funded by donors, displacing 656 people, including 359 children, across the West Bank. This represents a 32 per cent increase in number of structures demolished or seized, over 145 per cent increase in donor-funded structures, and a near 70 per cent increase in the number of people displaced, with a near 75 per cent increase in children, compared with the equivalent period in

2020. Since the new Israeli government was sworn in on 13 June 2021, 159 structures have been demolished, including 28 donor funded structures, displacing 231 Palestinians. This includes two mass demolitions in one week. The number of total structures destroyed under the new Government has increased by 148 percent compared to the same period last year and 28 times more donor funded structures have been destroyed.

WBPC members and likeminded countries urge Israel to halt settlement construction, demolitions and confiscation of Palestinian property. The continuation of this policy, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, violates international law, undermines the viability of the two-state solution and the prospect for a lasting peace in the region. We remain committed to protecting the rights of the Palestinians and to providing assistance to vulnerable populations in their current place of living in Area C.

Head of the EU Representative Office, Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff said: "It is with great despair that I again find myself visiting this community following a mass demolition where they have lost their homes and livelihoods, in the midst of the hottest summer months. Being a Bedouin community living under Israeli control in Area C, where they are not granted proper access to water or other infrastructure, they are already struggling to uphold their way of life. This latest demolition, where Israeli authorities seem determined to remove the community from the place where they have lived for decades, while hindering the delivery of humanitarian aid, is of course detrimental to the community, but also to the international community. As a representative of the EU and a member of the WBPC together with likeminded countries, we continue to demand that Israel ceases forcible transfers, evictions, demolitions and confiscations of homes, all of which constitute violations of international humanitarian law. The EU has also repeatedly called for the restitution or compensation of EU-funded humanitarian assets which have been demolished, dismantled or confiscated by Israel."