

Senior UN official calls on Israel to halt plans for relocating Palestinian Bedouin communities in West Bank

A senior United Nations humanitarian official on Wednesday called on Israeli authorities to halt plans to demolish Palestinian-owned structures and cease plans for the relocation of Palestinian Bedouin communities in the West Bank.

“We are monitoring the situation in Khan al Ahmar closely and are [deeply concerned](#) by what we see here, and in the scores of other vulnerable Bedouin communities,” UN Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick said.

Mr. McGoldrick visited the Khan al Ahmar-Abu al Helu, located on the outskirts of East Jerusalem in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with Scott Anderson, the UN [Relief and Works Agency](#)’s Director of Operations in the West Bank, and Palestinian officials.

“We call on the Israeli authorities to respect their legal obligations, as the occupying power, including through stopping the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures and ceasing plans for the relocation of Palestinian Bedouin communities,” Mr. McGoldrick stressed.

Khan al Ahmar-Abu al Helu is home to 181 people, 53 per cent of whom are children and 95 per cent of whom are Palestine refugees registered with the UN agency.

It is one of 46 Bedouin communities in the central West Bank that the UN considers being at risk of forcible transfer, due to a coercive environment generated by Israeli practices and policies, plans to move the communities from their current locations and other reasons.

Eighteen of these communities, including Khan al Ahmar, are located in or next to an area slated in part for a settlement plan – reportedly aimed at creating a continuous built-up area between Ma’ale Adumim and East Jerusalem.

Nearly all of the Khan al Ahmar community’s structures risk demolition by the Israeli authorities, including the school, initially built with donor support that serves some 170 students from the community and four surrounding ones, according to the [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#).

“The entire community of Khan el Ahmar-Abu al Helu, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees and who are amongst the most vulnerable Bedouin communities in the West Bank, is facing the risk of demolitions of their structures and relocation,” said Mr. Anderson.

For years, the residents have insisted on the right to return to their original lands, in what is now southern Israel, and, until this occurs, asks for international support to remain in their current location.

“The humanitarian impact of home demolition is severe and long lasting. It is well documented in previous instances that the transfer of Bedouin communities into urban settings is socially and economically non-viable. The Khan al Ahmar-Abu al Helu community has repeatedly called for the provision of suitable planning solutions and services in its current location,” Mr. Anderson added.

The visit came in advance of next week’s Israeli High Court of Justice case, which may determine the fate of the structures and Israeli relocation plan.