

Urgent Action

In Focus

An insight into the stories behind UAs

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"No more construction permits for Palestinians"

The fight to build a West Bank village school



Palestinian children of Upper Fasayil village standing in the school building that their local community is constructing. © Brighton-Tubas solidarity group

International attention is focusing on the West Bank village of Fasayil, as the Israeli army is soon due to decide whether to demolish a primary school, currently being built in the village. Activists around the world are uniting to protect the school from demolition. A military meeting at which the future of the school may be decided has been postponed to the end of December.

The threatened demolition affects scores of Palestinian primary school children who are

being denied the opportunity to have a school near their homes. The primary school is being built in Upper Fasayil, in the Jordan Valley region of the West Bank, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), and is at risk of demolition even before it is finished.

Motivated by the fact that the children of Upper Fasayil currently have to walk more than two kilometres to go to a school in Lower Fasayil, the local community are constructing the new school with the support of a

Palestinian non-governmental organization and international volunteers.

On 17 October, the Israeli army issued an order instructing all building work on the school to be stopped. The military order states that the concerned parties can request a building permit from the planning committee of the Israeli army. However, it is virtually impossible for Palestinians to obtain any building permits from the Israeli army in most areas of the West Bank, including in Fasayil and other villages in the Jordan Valley region of the West Bank. In 2003, Israeli army legal adviser Colonel Shlomo Politus told the Constitution, Justice and Law Committee of the Israeli Parliament that "practically speaking, [building by Palestinians in the Jordan Valley region of the West Bank] doesn't exist as an issue. There are no more construction permits for Palestinians."

When the inhabitants of Fasayil discussed whether to build the school, they were aware there was a risk that the Israeli army would prevent them from building it or would destroy it once it was built, but they decided to go ahead with the project in the hope that the school would be allowed and out of a desire to provide a facility which would improve the lives of the children. The army meeting at the end of December may decide the fate of the school.

The West Bank is part of the OPT, which has been under Israeli military occupation since 1967. The Israeli army froze the planning schemes in Palestinian towns and villages. Planning schemes which existed before 1967 and which are no longer suitable to cater for the needs of a growing population are used by the Israeli army as a basis for rejecting Palestinians' applications for building permits. The permit application process is prolonged, complicated and costly, and permission is invariably refused. Palestinians are therefore left with no option but to build their homes without permits. For decades, the Israeli authorities have responded by adopting a policy of mass demolition of Palestinian houses.

At the same time Israel has built some 150 settlements (colonies which are for the exclusive use of Jewish Israelis) on Palestinian

land throughout the West Bank. International law prohibits an occupying power from transferring its civilian population into the territory that it occupies. These unlawful settlements have been established by taking Palestinian land and by impeding Palestinians from using their land for building or agriculture, as is happening in Fasayil and many other villages.



Children from Upper Fasayil outside the school © Brighton-Tubas solidarity group

According to the Oslo Accords of 1993 (the first peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians), Israel gave the newly established Palestinian Authority (PA) responsibility for civil affairs (including building permits) in 40% of the West Bank territory, but Israel retained military and civil control of the remaining 60% of the West Bank (known as Area C), which includes the Jordan Valley. The Israeli army continues to ban Palestinians from building in these areas.

Fasayil residents, like the residents of many other villages of the Jordan Valley, are therefore forced to live in shacks and tents as the current infrastructure cannot keep up with the needs of the population. Yet, even these shacks and tents are not spared by the Israeli army's bulldozers. For example on 9 February 2006 the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that the Israeli army had demolished 15 sheds in Fasayil which were reportedly built without permits. On 8 September 2005 OCHA also reported that the Israeli army had demolished 14 shelters (tents and shacks) in Fasayil and al Jiftlik (another village in the Jordan Valley) for the same reason. These shelters, which had been provided to the villagers by the

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), were home to 89 people.

Thousands of Palestinian homes and other property have been destroyed by the Israeli army since the beginning of 2000, and tens of thousands of Palestinians have lost their homes or their livelihoods (see AI's report: [Under the rubble, House demolition and destruction of property MDE 15/040/2004](#)). At the same time, while the Israeli army prohibits Palestinians from building and demolishes their homes for lack of building permits, the Israeli authorities have developed comprehensive and efficient planning schemes for some 150 unlawful Israeli settlements – housing some 400,000 settlers - that they have established throughout the occupied West Bank. Much of the farmland previously owned by the inhabitants of Fasayil has been appropriated by the unlawful Israeli settlements of Tomer and Bet Syel, destroying the Palestinian villagers' traditional livelihood.

Moreover, in the thousands of cases in which Israeli houses have been built without permits, the Israeli army has not demolished them but instead issued retroactive building permits for these houses and for entire settlements established without government authorization. The existence of these Israeli settlements and related infrastructure in the occupied West Bank results in widespread violations of the rights of the Palestinian population, such as freedom of movement and access to water. Palestinians living in the Jordan Valley have been particularly severely impacted as Israeli authorities have effectively turned this large area of fertile land into an enclave, taken over by 36 unlawful Israeli settlements and closed military areas used by the Israeli army as firing practice grounds.

Since May 2005, the Israeli army has imposed further restrictions on the Palestinians living in the Jordan Valley. Palestinians whose identity documents do not give the northern Jordan Valley as their place of residence are not allowed to live in the Jordan Valley and are often prevented from even visiting the area. Demolition of villagers' homes and the increased restrictions imposed on their movements and on their access to water – a crucial commodity for the villagers who

depend on farming for subsistence - have been widely used by the Israeli army as means to force the Palestinian population to leave the Jordan Valley. Under such pressures many Palestinians, particularly the young, are being forced to leave the Jordan Valley.

Amnesty International is one of a number of organizations highlighting the situation in Fasayil, and calling on the Israeli authorities to halt plans to demolish the school.

For more information see AI's report *Enduring Occupation: Palestinians under Siege in the West Bank*, MDE 15/033/2007. To take action on this case, contact individuals@amnesty.org, or your section office.