



Israeli Authorities Spark Outrage Over the Demolitions of Palestinian Shops and Homes in the Jerusalem Neighborhood of Silwan

Israeli authorities began their demolitions of Palestinian shops and homes in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan this week, sparking outrage and condemnation. Israel had distributed demolition orders for the generational homes of 13 Palestinian families and others, with social justice and rights activists highlighting that the action is aimed at altering the demographic structure of the area to make way for more illegal Israeli settlers. Israeli forces raided the neighborhood and escorted a bulldozer through the streets of Silwan, firing tear gas canisters and rubber-coated steel bullets at local Palestinian residents who had gathered to oppose the demolitions and inequitable permit building policies. The building permits required in Israel are discriminatory toward Palestinians, with the attainment of them near impossible, and home demolitions and court-ordered forced displacements are designed to drive them from the city of Jerusalem. In addition to the human rights violations being committed through the demolition orders and biased building permit practices, Israeli authorities were also criticized for their abusive response to activists protesting the controversial behavior.

Israel is committing multiple human rights violations with these building permits and demolition orders. The United Nations has declared that all citizens have the right to adequate housing, non-discriminatory building policies, and the freedom to choose their residence. As it has done with respect to many other issues as well, the Israeli government has violated these rights and is in breach of standards of international law. By demolishing homes, refusing permits to Palestinians solely on an ethnic basis, and displacing families, Israeli authorities have denied Palestinians living within the borders of Israel their fundamental freedoms and rights. Unsurprisingly, Israel has a track record of human rights abuses, as it has also used unwarranted force toward peaceful demonstrators and activists, systematic oppression, collective punishment, the denial of civil liberties, airstrikes on civilian and residential areas, and other methods to try and repress Palestinians. The home demolitions and unjust building permit practices are just a couple of these in an overall long list.

There are concrete policies which demonstrate the unbalanced nature of the Israeli legal system. For example, under Israeli law, only Jewish but not Palestinian residents can request the “return” of their property if they show that their families lived in Jerusalem prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948. Thus, even if Palestinian families have been living somewhere for decades or centuries, Israeli authorities do not recognize their ties to lands in the same manner that they do for Jewish citizens. This is problematic, because it highlights a clear discrepancy with respect to land policy based purely on ethnic and racial components. As a result, Palestinian families can struggle via court proceedings for years in an attempt to stave off the unethical home demolitions and forced displacements that they are so often subjected to.

Lastly, the designation of certain areas – many times those with predominately Palestinian populations – as “open” or “green” space is another way in which Israeli authorities enact discriminatory land practices. This is in fact what has been done in the critiqued recent case of Silwan, where the neighborhood’s Al-Bustan section has seen a ban on all construction in an effort to pave the way for the Israeli plans of an archaeological park there.