



Harvesting under Occupation

There are more than 10 million olive trees in the West Bank. The annual olive harvest that traditionally takes place between September and November is highly significant for Palestinian communities, both economically and culturally. It carries powerful biblical, spiritual and symbolic significance, associated with notions of peace, 'rootedness' and resilience. Up to 100,000 Palestinian families depend on the olive harvest for their income.

But the olive harvest, like every other aspect of Palestinian life in the West Bank, is carried out under a military occupation that has lasted for 53 years and which continues to profoundly and negatively impact the lives, livelihoods, and human rights of the Palestinian people, even if the threat of formal annexation may have temporarily receded.

- About 25% of the West Bank has been declared Israeli state land since 1967. Of the area that has been allocated to be used for building etc., 99.8% have been assigned to settlements.ⁱ
- Almost 3,500 housing units and public buildings in settlements have been built on Palestinian private land.ⁱⁱ
- In many cases, Palestinians have no or limited access to their land in the area of or around settlements.ⁱⁱⁱ
- To ensure the security of settlers, Israel massively restricts the freedom of movement of the Palestinian population in the West Bank through over 700 checkpoints and obstacles, e.g. checkpoints, concrete walls, ditches etc.^{iv}
- The route of Israel's separation barrier leads to a situation of de facto annexation of almost 10% of the West Bank, including numerous settlements in the so-called 'Seam Zone' between the Green Line and the separation barrier. Around 11,000 Palestinians need special permits to live in their own homes in this zone and to be able to access the rest of the West Bank through checkpoints.^v
- Between 2010 and 2019, 6,120 buildings were destroyed or confiscated in the West Bank, 9,262 people lost their homes, half of them children.^{vi} Around 13,000 demolition orders for Palestinian buildings are pending implementation in area C of the West Bank.^{vii} On average 97% of Palestinian building applications in area C are rejected.^{viii}
- In 2019, settlers committed 341 attacks on Palestinians and their property.^{ix} Almost 8,000 olive trees, the yield of which is an important source of income in the Palestinian territories, were destroyed by settlers in that year alone.^x

Palestinian access to land and olive groves in the Seam Zone has been significantly reduced by the Israeli authorities. According to UNOCHA, of 74 agricultural checkpoints that farmers have to cross to reach their trees, 53 only open during harvest time.^{xi} As a result, it is not possible for the farmers to take care of the trees all year round, which leads to a significant drop in yield.

In addition, Palestinians can only cross the agricultural checkpoints with a permit. In 2018, 72% of permit applications were rejected. In autumn 2019, access to land in the Seam Zone for olive growers with valid permits was further reduced to 40 days per year.^{xii}

During the 2019 olive harvest, UNOCHA recorded 60 attacks by settlers on Palestinians and their property. 10 people were injured, including 2 children. About 2,700 trees were damaged and 160 tons of olives were lost.^{xiii}

Because of this situation, in recent years, coordinated by the local office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the deployment of a protective presence to support Palestinian families during the olive harvest has been organized in 90 locations across the West Bank. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there won't be a similar protective presence – involving Israeli and foreign volunteers - in most of these locations. That's particularly unfortunate, because during the pandemic house demolitions and settler attacks have been on the rise.

- The Israeli authorities announced on April 7 that they would not destroy any inhabited Palestinian homes during the pandemic and would generally minimize the implementation of demolition orders.^{xiv} However, according to UNOCHA^{xv}, 389 Palestinian buildings were destroyed between March and August 2020, an average of 65 per month, the highest average in four years. 442 Palestinians were made homeless. In August, the number of people affected was 205, the highest monthly level since January 2017. 50 objects that were made available as humanitarian aid were destroyed in this same time period.
- On March 26, material was confiscated in Khirbet Ibziq that was supposed to be used to build a makeshift clinic and several emergency shelters for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.^{xvi}
- On September 10, Israeli authorities destroyed and confiscated parts of the roof as well as tables and chairs of a newly built elementary school in Ras al-Tin.^{xvii}
- UNOCHA reports^{xviii} that despite regulations to contain the pandemic that also apply to settlers, attacks by settlers against Palestinians and their property continue. Indeed, between the beginning of the year and the end of May, at least 63 Palestinians, including 13 children, were injured in 143 attacks. Around 3,700 trees were destroyed and over 100 vehicles were damaged.

To achieve real peace with justice for all people in Palestine and Israel, the occupation must end.

In times of common fragility, where no human power could prevent the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the context of the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories, we are called to find forms of creative solidarity as a sign of hope and a contribution to the journey of Just Peace in the Holy Land.

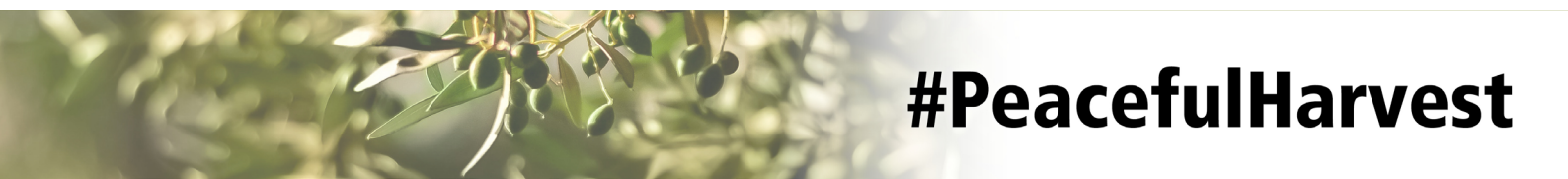
We therefore ask you to stand in solidarity with those affected by the occupation by

- Working for a lasting and just peace for Palestinians and Israelis.
- Speaking out publicly about the need to protect the rights and dignity of all those living under military occupation in the Holy Land.
- Calling for an end to the Israeli occupation.
- Supporting those who work locally and internationally for peace and justice for all in Palestine and Israel.



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- i <http://peacenow.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Lands-Allocated-to-Palestinians-1.pdf>
- ii <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-revealed-3-500-settlement-homes-built-on-private-palestinian-land-1.5445036>
- iii <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/restricted-access-farming-land-taken-over-settlers-despite-legal-rulings-israeli-courts>
- iv <https://www.ochaopt.org/atlas2019/>
- v https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/ocha_opt_barrier_factsheet_july_2013_english.pdf
- vi https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hummonitor_dec_2019_final.pdf
- vii <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/new-legislation-impedes-challenges-demolitions-and-seizures-west-bank>
- viii <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-palestinians-risk-forcible-transfer>
- ix https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hummonitor_dec_2019_final.pdf
- x <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/record-yield-reported-2019-olive-harvest>
- xi <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/record-yield-reported-2019-olive-harvest>
- xii [ibid](#)
- xiii [ibid](#)
- xiv <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-agrees-to-halt-most-demolitions-of-palestinian-buildings-during-pandemic/>
- xv <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/unlawful-demolitions-west-bank-spike-during-covid-19>
- xvi https://www.btselem.org/press_release/20200326_israel_confiscates_clinic_tents_during_coronavirus_crisis
- xvii https://www.btselem.org/facing_expulsion_blog?nid=213075
- xviii <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/unprotected-settler-attacks-against-palestinians-rise-amidst-outbreak-covid-19>



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