

Settlement Monitor

This section covers items—reprinted articles, statistics, and maps—pertaining to Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. They are reproduced as published, including original spelling and stylistic idiosyncrasies.

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NETANYAHU'S SETTLEMENT SURGE

3RD NETANYAHU GOVERNMENT: 40% INCREASE IN CONSTRUCTION (EXCERPTS)

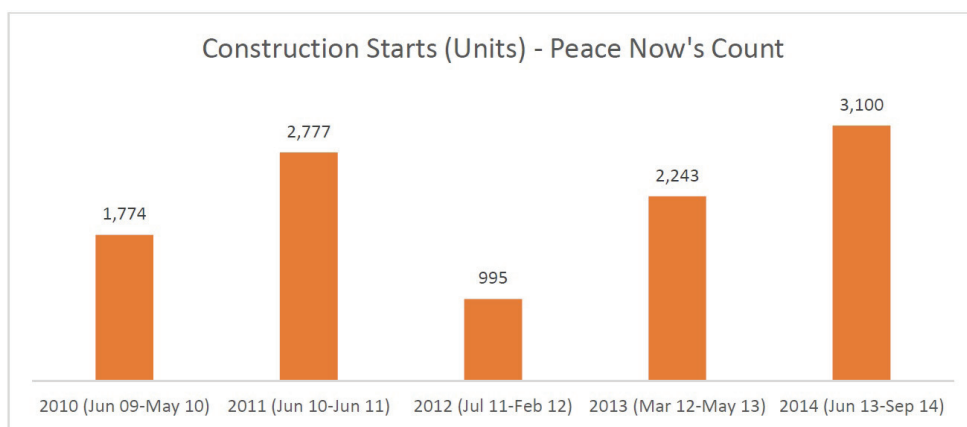
Presented below are excerpts from a report on settlement activity under the third Netanyahu government by the Israeli nongovernmental organization, Peace Now. Published in February 2015, the full report, including all graphs and figures, is available at peacenow.org.il.

Summary of the third Netanyahu government: A substantial increase in construction starts, planning, and tenders—specifically in isolated settlements and the most disputed areas in terms of the chance for two states. [. . .]

A. Construction Starts

According to Peace Now count: In 2014 construction of 3,100 residential units began in the settlements; 2,671 permanent structures and 429 caravans and light construction structures.

In addition, 165 public buildings (kindergartens, educational institutions, synagogues, etc.) and 92 industrial and agricultural structures were built. 9% of the construction—287 residential units—occurred in the illegal outposts, while the number of settlers therein, according to Peace Now estimates, comprise only 4% of all settlers. (See map of the major construction sites [\[here\]](#).) This demonstrates an increase of 40% compared to the respective period last year.



(The division into years in counting construction is according to the dates of aerial photos received by Peace Now—sometimes more or less than 12 months, as specified below the columns.)

MASSIVE CONSTRUCTION IN THE MOST DIFFICULT SETTLEMENTS IN TERMS OF THE TWO-STATE NEGOTIATIONS

68% of the construction starts (2,115 housing units) occurred east of the outline proposed by the Geneva Initiative, on an area intended, according to the Initiative, for the Palestinian state and only 32% (985 residential units) were started to the west of the said outline, in an area intended for land swapping.

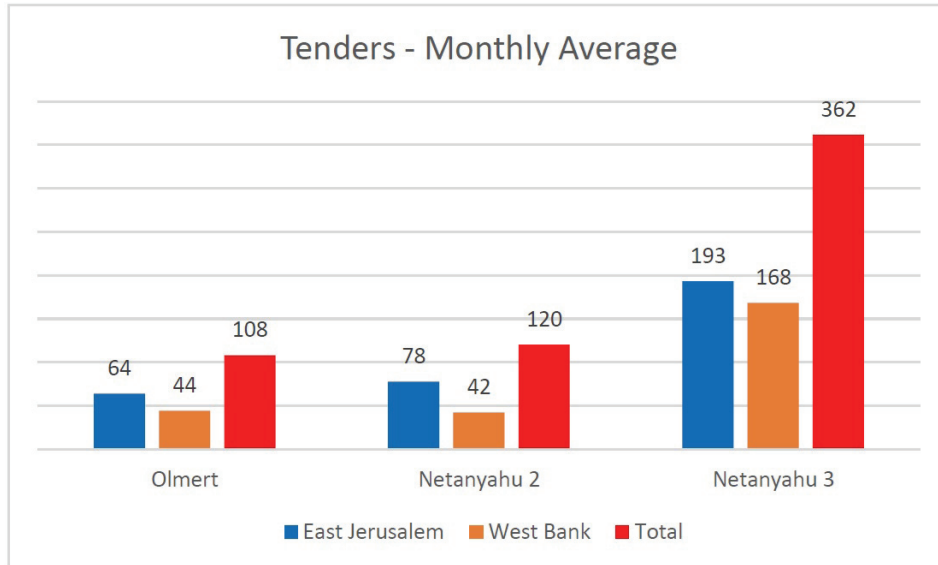
Over the years, the main border dispute between Israel and the Palestinians related to the settlements that Israel wanted to consider part of the “blocks” to be annexed to Israel, but due to their geographical location within the West Bank, preventing Palestinian continuity, the Palestinians objected.

42% of the construction starts in 2014 (1,308 residential units) were carried out in these settlements, between the Geneva Initiative outline and the planned outline for the barrier (mainly in the Ariel, Karnei Shomron and Efrat region).

B. Tenders

2014 was a record year in tender publication, for at least a decade. Tender publication (some repeated tenders) eventually halted the negotiations and led Secretary of State John Kerry to withdraw his efforts.

The current Netanyahu government nearly tripled the average number of tenders as compared to the previous Netanyahu government.



[The monthly average of tenders published over the last three Israeli administrations.]
For a complete list of the tenders published in recent years [click here](#).

In addition to the above tenders, on January 30th, 2015, tenders for another 450 units in the West Bank were issued (114 in Adam, 102 in Kiryat Arba, 156 in Elkana and 78 in Alfei Menashe). Those units were already proposed in tenders in the past but were not sold and were never built.

C. Plans—100% Increase Compared to the Previous Government

The Netanyahu government continued the previous government's trend of promoting plans throughout the West Bank. During its 22 months in office thus far (18 March 2013–January 2015), at least 66 plans were promoted for 10,113 different residential units in 41 settlements (monthly average of 460 residential units).

Comparatively, during the 47.5 months of the previous Netanyahu government (31 March 2009–17 March 2013), at least 89 plans were promoted for 11,193 different residential units in 50 settlements (monthly average of 235 residential units).

In all, both Netanyahu governments, 31 March 2009–January 2015, promoted at least 106 construction plans for 13,077 different residential units in 57 settlements. [. . .]

“NEW AND RECYCLED EAST JERUSALEM SETTLEMENT TENDERS”

This update, published by Terrestrial Jerusalem on 29 April 2015, explains the implications of a batch of newly published East Jerusalem settlement tenders. It is available at t-j.org.il.

On April 27, the Israel Lands Authority [published tenders](#) for the construction of 77 new settlement units. Of these, only 18 are brand new (to be built in Pisgat Zeev, under Town Plan 11647).

The remaining tenders were previously published but not awarded, and are now being recycled. These are the tender for another 23 units in Pisgat Zeev (published originally back on August 11, 2013, with the commencement of the Kerry talks) and 36 units in Neve Yaacov (published originally on January 12, 2014, during Israeli-Palestinian talks).

The tenders for the 18 new units in Pisgat Zeev are the first new tenders in East Jerusalem since the tenders for 400 units in Ramat Shlomo (the “Biden plan”) on June 5, 2014. Indeed, since the major controversy generated by the statutory approval of the 2,610 units under the Givat Hamatos plan at the end of September 2014, there had not only been no new tenders, but also no new plans deposited for public review and no new plans receiving statutory approval for East Jerusalem.

What is the significance of these tenders?

- While the number of brand new units tendered is low, the publication of these new and recycled tenders are nonetheless a significant development—one which does not augur well for the future.
- It is likely that these tenders were published with Netanyahu’s knowledge and consent. Why? Because the freeze on new tenders since June 5, 2014, has been so complete that it clearly had to have been coordinated with (or directed by) Netanyahu; a decision now to break that freeze would require the same.
- With these new and recycled tenders, Netanyahu appears to “be testing the waters” in a run-up to the formation of his new coalition—in fact, it is surprising that it has taken so long. If so, the *de facto*, albeit partial, settlement freeze in East Jerusalem may well be over.
- This mixed bag of new and recycled tenders may be indicative of future settlement patterns in the coming weeks and months in East Jerusalem. Why? Because Netanyahu has for the most part run out of tenders that can be issued in East Jerusalem.
- The only place left where large numbers of East Jerusalem tenders are available to be published is Givat Hamatos with its 1,500-2,610 units. Almost all other possible tenders were published in the previous surges. Other than Givat Hamatos (which Netanyahu has apparently committed to the U.S. and Europe that he will not pursue), what remains are residual units here and there—like those published on April 27—that amount to a cumulative total of a few hundred units.

In short, these tenders may well be a signal that Netanyahu is once again opening the settlement floodgates. However, the construction potential in East Jerusalem settlements under approved government plans has pretty much been exhausted (as in, they have all already been implemented). This is a stark commentary on extraordinary ineffectiveness of international protestations against East Jerusalem settlement activity; indeed, the success in stopping Givat Hamatos and E-1 has come at the cost of the Israeli government moving full steam ahead and every other settlement project possible.

This means that if the settlement floodgates are opened, new developments will likely be focused more in the West Bank than East Jerusalem. And to the extent that there is a new surge of settlement-related activity in East Jerusalem, it will likely be focused more on plans related to the settlement enclaves in the Old City and its environs, rather than in the large settlement neighborhoods.

THE SETTLEMENT OUTPOST SYSTEM

“THE LIE ISRAEL SOLD THE WORLD—SETTLEMENT ‘OUTPOSTS’”

This piece on settlement outposts, the first of a two-part series, appeared on +972 Magazine on 3 April 2015. (The second post follows immediately below.) It was authored by Yossi Gurvitz for Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organization. The text is available at www.972mag.com.

Israel has not officially created new settlements since 1996. This is an international guarantee made by the government. Creating a new settlement requires a government decision, and with three exceptions (the legalization of the outposts Bruchin and Rechalim, together with Nofei Nechemia, and Sansana in 2013), no such decision has been taken. Effectively, however, there are about 100 unofficial settlements in the West Bank. Officially, they are illegal. Officially, there are demolition orders against all the structures within these unofficial settlements. Practically, they get unceasing support from the government, without which they could not exist.

These settlements are euphemistically (and innocently) given the title of “outposts.” Their history begins two years after that government decision, when former Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon called upon the settlers to storm the hills and take them over. What you seize, we’ll keep, he told them. And thus the outpost movement was born.

In 2005, the Sasson Report on outposts was presented to the government; in its honor, Yesh Din recently published a new position paper titled, “[Under the Radar](#).” Sasson had already identified the new settlement method at the time: the entire Israeli establishment more or less aids and abets the creation of outposts. After the land grab by Israeli civilians, the IDF promptly provides them with protection. Then, other authorities make sure water and electricity are provided. A short while after that, we have “facts on the ground,” which require legal procedures to change (procedures that can take years in the court system).

Even when it is clear that construction there is illegal, no one is put on trial—there is no single Israeli unit in charge of enforcing construction regulations in the West Bank. Recently, the High Court of Justice accepted the position of the State’s Attorney, according to which those in charge of the illegal construction of Ulpana Hill in Beit El should not be tried. The government used the stunning excuse: since it never indicted anyone for this offense, it may be that the suspects will attempt to claim “abuse of process.” If we take this logic further—and not much further—there will simply never be any point in attempting to indict someone for illegally taking over land in the West Bank. He or she will always be able to claim abuse of process.

Looking at the State’s statements in court on the issue of the outposts, we see how its position has slowly changed. In 2008, the State took the position that it intends to remove many of the outposts, but that it would do so at its own pace and according to its own considerations. The State did not tell the truth; it has not removed even a single outpost without a clear order by a court. This, of course, was able to buy it some time.

In 2011 there was a change in the State’s position, when it told the courts that it intends to pursue a course of partial enforcement. It would remove outposts built on private land, but will examine the possibility of legalizing those built on public land (which it prefers to call “state land” in order to create the impression that it owns them).

But this position also changed. In 2012, the government ordered the formation of the Levi Commission. (For more on that commission, see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).) It ruled that the outposts should be legalized, while rejecting the Partition Decision of 1947 and [returning to the Balfour Declaration](#). In 2013, therefore, the State changed its position once more: it told the court that unless there is a concrete appellant who is an owner of land and can prove that the land upon which the outpost is built belongs to him, then “political considerations” take precedence over law enforcement. That is, the State, represented by the State’s Attorney—tasked with enforcing the law—is telling the court something astonishing: political will can override the acute need of any civilized state to enforce its laws; that political will can force back the old precept that “one should pray for the welfare of the realm, for without fear of it, man will eat man alive.” It should be noted that in one of his latest rulings, ordering the removal of the illegal outpost of Amona, Chief Justice Grunis ruled that in the case of illegal construction, there is no need for a concrete appellant; the very illegality of the construction requires demolition.

During 2013 and 2014, we saw another change in the state’s position: now it tells the court that while legally, the outposts mentioned in the petition ought to be removed, “special circumstances” prevent this removal.

Following the State’s behavior, we see the following deplorable pattern: historically, the government of Israel decided to mislead both the world and its own court system. The government created some 100 new settlements contrary to international law and its own obligations; it provides these settlements with every sort of aid, beginning with military protection and ending with legal cover. These days, it is trying to legalize about a quarter of the outposts—some are declared settlements, some are called “neighborhoods” inside already existing settlements.

In order to protect these settlements, it is willing to shake the foundations of the rule of law—one of the foundations of modern statehood—and it is willing to quietly ally itself with felons. Those felons, in effect, become its emissaries, the people over whom the state spreads its aegis. It promises them that it will reward them with the land they grabbed by force for the felonies they commit in its secret service.

And these, actually, are the minor offenses the State and the felons commit together. As for the more serious ones, they’ll be described in the next post.

“WEST BANK OUTPOSTS: AN ENTIRE SYSTEM OF DISPOSSESSION”

This blog post, published by +972 Magazine on 22 April 2015, is the second in a two-part series on settlement outposts. The first piece appears above. It was authored by Yossi Gurvitz for Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organization. The text is available at www.972mag.com.

If we had to look for a good example of the *meaning* of the outpost system—the unofficial settlements Israel builds in the West Bank—we could hardly expect a better one than that supplied by the minister of defense himself. Commenting on a legal appeal that—[contrary to some reports](#), Yesh Din is not part of—demands the removal of the Mitzpe Kramim outpost, Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon said ([Hebrew](#)): “This location was established legally, with the support of the prime minister and the defense minister. True, later someone appealed, an Israeli organization of course, a leftist organization that found some Arab who claims ownership.” As painful as it is that this is

the level of understanding displayed by a senior government minister, the interesting part here is actually the where [sic] Ya'alon talks about “some Arab who claims ownership.”

With some brutality, Ya'alon touches on the main problem of the outpost movement: its violation of Palestinian human rights in the West Bank. Yesh Din's research over the years, and particularly its report, “[The Road to Dispossession](#),” which uses the outpost Adei-Ad as a microcosm, finds that the creation of an outpost is a steady source for unceasing violation of the rights of the Palestinian residents in adjacent villages. This violation is inherent in the existence of the outpost.

Let me explain. When an outpost is created, it grabs territory, which later becomes the core of the outpost. This territory often includes private Palestinian land. Around the core there is what is known as the SSA—“special security area”—which Palestinians may not enter except on special occasions, since it serves as the perimeter of the outpost. Outside the SSA there is Palestinian land that becomes a source of friction.

Why is it a source of friction? Because the goal of outposts is to expand. Adei-Ad, our test case, now includes territory nearly 30 times its original size. How do outposts expand? Israeli civilians arrive in the vicinity and either attack Palestinian farmers or damage their crops. This is done in order to terrorize them and force them to abandon their land. When the land is abandoned, it is taken over.

In order to do so, of course, the outposts require assistance from their main partner, the government of Israel: soldiers who do not prevent violations such as settler riots; policemen who do not properly investigate attacks on Palestinians; prosecutors who close cases without due cause; a Civil Administration that does not enforce its own demolition orders; government offices that hurry to provide services for illegal settlements; and at the end of the line—the state attorneys, who time and again appear in court to defend these massive violations of the law, not to mention postponing bringing an end to them for long as possible. [Time after time](#), the state proposes legalizing these outposts as a gift to the lawbreakers.

The first violation of Palestinian rights is that of their right to property—in other words, the land that is lost when Israeli civilians take it over. A short while after that comes the violation of their right to life and security: if you go to work your land, note that there is a chance you will not [return home in one piece](#). Palestinian freedom of movement is also violated: with the creation of an outpost and the declaration of an SSA, its territory keeps expanding, and Palestinians are forbidden from entering.

All this ultimately leads to the violation of Palestinians' right and ability to make a living. Two of the villages near Adei-Ad have already been emptied of many of their residents. An agricultural settlement, after all, cannot exist if its land is taken away by force.

We are not dealing with just one case: there are about 100 outposts. Every time one of them is legalized, it creates a precedent for the legalizing the next outpost, and creates incentives for Israeli civilians to seize more land and terrorize more Palestinians.

This isn't an accident, it's a system. The outposts are approved, as Ya'alon admitted, by the defense and prime ministers. This is the system, as shown in [the previous post](#), in which all government offices are complicit; this is the system whose existence is now out in the open, with no blushing, announced by the defense minister. This system means the systemic, intentional, violation of Palestinian human rights, and it must stop.

EXPULSION, DEMOLITION, AND SEIZURE: ISRAELI SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

“HIGH COURT RULES ON ABSENTEE PROPERTY LAW IN JERUSALEM”

This summary of the High Court’s ruling was published by Terrestrial Jerusalem on 29 April 2015. The text is available at t-j.org.il.

On April 15, the Israeli High Court of Justice [handed down a ruling](#) regarding the continued use of the Absentee Property Law in East Jerusalem (see our 2013 report, [Everything You Need to Know About Jerusalem & the Absentee Property Law](#), for background). The Court took the case after two lower courts ruled in contradictory ways with respect to application of the law in East Jerusalem, in one case ruling that the seizure of Palestinian property must be cancelled, and in a separate case upholding the state’s right to seize the property of another Palestinian. Both cases were appealed, forcing the High Court—which clearly preferred to stay out of this matter—to rule.

The Court’s ruling on this extremely sensitive issue epitomizes the extent to which bad policies yield bad laws and bad rulings. In this case, the Court ruled, in essence, as follows:

- 1) The Court upheld Israel’s legal authority to seize so-called absentee property in East Jerusalem. This property at this point virtually exclusively [*sic*] of homes and land owned by Palestinians who live in the West Bank, which according to the Absentee Property Law still counts as “enemy territory,” despite having been under Israeli control for nearly 50 years. Reportedly, the Court was concerned that if it failed to uphold the validity of the Absentee Property Law in Jerusalem, it could lead to a high number of new court cases with Palestinian property owners demanding that past seizures of land must be cancelled. Notably, settlers living in the West Bank should technically be subject to the Absentee Property Law, since they reside in “enemy territory,” but, of course, it has never been applied this way (Israel’s chief justice argued that the law should be amended to fix this “absurd” situation and make clear that it does not apply to Israeli settlers).
- 2) The Court ruled that notwithstanding Israel’s right to use the Absentee Property Law to seize property from Palestinians in East Jerusalem, it should limit the implementation of this right as much as possible, and that going forward such seizures should have the approval of the attorney general.
- 3) The Court ruled, in effect, that notwithstanding the principle of limiting the implementation of Israel’s right to use the Absentee Property Law to seize property from Palestinians in East Jerusalem, Israel can use the Absentee Property Law to seize property in East Jerusalem from Palestinian owners when it really, really wants to.

What this means, in short, is that the Court has upheld in principle the validity of the Absentee Property Law which makes Palestinian property rights in East Jerusalem relative and conditional, where in the same circumstances such rights are, for Israelis, absolute. The Court thereby is allowing Israel, when it so chooses, to seize Palestinian property.

For the majority of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, this ruling will have little direct impact, given that—at least at this point—Israeli settlers and politicians are not targeting their neighborhoods for settlement. For Palestinians living in neighborhoods targeted by settlers and right-wing politicians—like the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, Silwan, Sheikh Jarrah, Jabel

Mukkaber, and the Mount of Olives—this ruling potentially opens the door for the renewal of the use of the Absentee Property Law to deprive them of their homes and property, while significantly limiting their legal recourse through the courts (a possibility settler advocates have [cheered](#)).

Talia Sasson, who for 25 years worked in the State Attorney’s office (and became famous after being picked by then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to write a landmark report on illegal settlement construction), published a powerful oped criticizing the ruling: [“Israel’s High Court Denies Justice to Palestinian Property Owners”](#) (highly recommended reading). PLO Executive Committee Member Hanan Ashrawi commented that “. . .With the application of its Absentee Property Law in occupied East Jerusalem, the State of Israel is perpetuating the Nakba of 1948” (longer analysis and remarks [here](#)). Elsewhere, the PLO reportedly called the ruling an effort to [“legalise the occupation’s theft.”](#) For a pro-seizure, pro-settlements perspective, see [this report](#) from Arutz Sheva.

“PALESTINIAN VILLAGE KHIRBET SUSIYA UNDER IMMINENT THREAT OF DEMOLITION AND EXPULSION”

This article on the village of Susiya highlights the array of means deployed by Israel to drive Palestinians off their land. It was published by the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem on 7 May 2015. The text is available at www.btselem.org.

On 4 May 2015, Justice Noam Sohlberg of Israel’s High Court of Justice (HCJ) rejected a petition for an interim order that would freeze the implementation of demolition orders issued against homes in the village of Khirbet Susiya, which lies in the southern Hebron hills in the West Bank. The village residents requested the order as part of their petition to the court against the Civil Administration’s decision to reject the master plan they had drawn up for the village. In the petition, Att. Qamar Mashraki from Israeli NGO [Rabbis for Human Rights](#) argued on behalf of the residents that their plan had been rejected for improper considerations, and that this constituted a double standard in planning and blatant discrimination against the Palestinian population.

The meaning of Justice Sohlberg’s decision is that at any moment, the Civil Administration can demolish all homes in the village. The residents, some 250–350 people depending on the season, will be left homeless in harsh desert conditions. They will be effectively expelled from their land in an act that is not only cruel but also illegal.

Israeli settlers in the area have already taken over almost 300 hectares of the villagers’ land. Past experience indicates that if the Israeli authorities succeed in expelling the villagers from Khirbet Susiya, either the settlers will directly take over the land or the authorities will take control of it and allocate it to settlers.

The state’s treatment of Khirbet Susiya and its residents illustrates its systemic use of planning laws to prevent Palestinians in Area C, which is under full Israeli control, from construction and development that meet their needs: most Palestinians in the area live in villages where the Israeli authorities have refused to draw up master plans and connect them to water and power supplies, under various pretexts. With no other choice, the residents eventually build homes without permits and subsequently live under constant threat of demolition and expulsion. This policy is intended to serve the goal, explicitly declared by Israeli officials in the past, of taking over land in

the southern Hebron hills in order to formally annex it to Israel in a permanent-status agreement with the Palestinians, and annex it de facto until such a time.

In implementing this policy, Israel is acting in contradiction to its obligation to care for the needs of West Bank residents as the occupying power there. This is a grave breach of the prohibition in international humanitarian law on forced transfer of residents of an occupied territory. The prohibition permits such transfer only in exceptional cases, from which Khirbet Susiya is a far cry.

The state has been abusing the residents of Khirbet Susiya for many years: the military and the Civil Administration have repeatedly removed the residents from their homes, in which they have lived since before 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank. The Civil Administration is responsible for all aspects of civilian life in Area C and is theoretically supposed to promote the well-being of the local population. In practice, the Administration uses its planning systems, in which Palestinians are not represented, to prevent them from promoting solutions that would meet their needs, barring them from building legally and from connecting to water and power supplies. The authorities also systematically refrain from protecting the residents of Khirbet Susiya from settlers who attack them or vandalize their property, and restrict their free access to the main town in the district, Yatta.

Over the years, the villagers petitioned the HCJ several times against demolition of their homes, requesting that they be permitted to build legally. However, the Court repeatedly adopted formalistic arguments and refused to force the authorities to fulfill their obligations, which include drawing up a master plan for the village and not demolishing homes there, so that the residents can continue to live in the place in reasonable conditions.

In contrast to Israeli settlers in the West Bank, Palestinian residents there are considered “protected persons” under international humanitarian law. The violation of their rights is especially blatant given the active support provided by Israeli authorities to construction and expansion of settlements in the area, even when they are established in contravention of Israeli law.

Background (See Additional Details Here):

The Palestinian village of Khirbet Susiya has existed in the South Hebron Hills since the 19th century. In 1983, the Israeli settlement of Susiya was established near the village, on Palestinian land that had been declared state land by Israel. Since then, the Israeli authorities have been working to force the Palestinian residents out of the area.

In 1986, they were expelled from their original village, which now functions as an archeological site run by settlers, who also live on the spot. The military expelled the residents again in 2001—a short time after Palestinians killed Israeli Yair Har Sinai from the Susiya settlement. The residents relocated to their privately owned agricultural land.

In October 2013, after a long struggle, the Sub-Committee for Planning and Licensing of the Civil Administration’s Supreme Planning Council rejected the master plan that the residents had drawn up for Khirbet Susiya. At the same time the Civil Administration announced its decision to issue final demolition orders for all structures in the village. The sub-committee cited several reasons for its decision that conveyed a patronizing, unprofessional attitude. For instance, one argument was that the number of residents—several hundred people—was too small to warrant an independent community in terms of planning. Remarkably, the sub-committee has had no

problem approving tiny illegal outposts established by Israeli settlers in the West Bank. The sub-committee further argued that the plan would prevent the villagers from developing and breaking the cycle of poverty; it did not see fit to mention that the villagers' drudge-filled existence is largely due to restrictions imposed by the Civil Administration itself, including the lack of amenities. The Administration recommended that the people of Susiya make an alternative plan for a location closer to the town of Yatta, a move that would effectively transfer the residents of Susiya out of Area C and expel them from their land.

In February 2014, Rabbis for Human Rights petitioned the HCJ, arguing that the Sub-Committee for Planning and Licensing had made an unreasonable decision in rejecting the master plan. The Court rejected the request for an interim order filed as part of the petition, and the village now faces immediate demolition.

The Israeli authorities' policy towards the residents of Khirbet Susiya starkly contrasts their generous planning policy towards Israeli settlers in the area. The settlers of Susiya and its outposts enjoy full provision of services and infrastructure and are in no danger of their homes being demolished—despite the fact that the outposts are illegal under Israeli law and in the settlement itself, according to figures published by settler organization Regavim, 23 homes were built on privately-owned Palestinian land.

“SETTLEMENTS THREATEN PALESTINE'S HISTORIC SITES”

This article on the appropriation of Palestinian archaeological and historical landmarks was published on 3 May 2015 by Al-Monitor. It was authored by Ahmad Melhem, a Palestinian journalist for al-Watan News based in Ramallah. The text is available at www.al-monitor.com.

Settlers from the [Leshem settlement](#) in the northern West Bank [took over the archaeological village of Deir Samaan](#) on April 12. The Leshem settlement, constructed in 2013, is located west of Salfit governorate. [Targeting archaeological landmarks](#) and stealing their contents is part of the policy adopted by Israel following the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Saleh Tawafsha, general director of the [Palestinian] Ministry of Tourism's Department of Antiquities Protection, told Al-Monitor, “Deir Samaan is an archaeological landmark that dates back to the Roman period. It consists of several monuments such as residential buildings, a church and mosaic floors. Since 1967, Israel has been fiercely attacking these archaeological sites. It has established several settlements like the Shilo settlement, built over ‘[Khirbet Ceylon](#),’ a Canaanite city and archaeological site, north of Ramallah, as well as the Leshem settlement that encircles Deir Samaan.”

Khaled Maali, a researcher in settlement affairs who is closely following the situation in Deir Samaan, told Al-Monitor, “The settlers are digging around the archaeological site and changing its features. They set up buildings near it and created roads to access the site, which the settlement borders.”

The village of al-Walaja, located southwest of Jerusalem and inside the Green Line, has also been [exposed to a targeted campaign](#) set up by occupation authorities. The campaign aims to seize the land and relics and build touristic sites and a public park. Al-Walaja is exceptionally scenic and has 18 natural water sources.

The appeal of this village, whose territory extends into the West Bank, is the presence of those 18 springs. This includes Ain al-Haniyeh, a spring that is located at the armistice demarcation line, or the virtual separation agreed upon by Israel and Arab countries following the 1948 war. The village is subjected to Israeli drilling, exploration and [theft of artifacts](#). Israel ratified a decision to create a garden called Refaim that spreads over 5,700 acres of the village and 1,200 acres of the territories occupied in 1967.

Al-Walaja Mayor Abd al-Rahman Abu al-Teen told Al-Monitor, “Ain al-Haniyeh has arches, buildings and Byzantine mosaic floors, but the occupation authorities are preparing to implement a plan to establish a public park there. Al-Walaja is around 5,000 years old, and the occupation authorities are currently controlling it.”

Tawafsha said that the occupation authorities announced the [establishment of 12 public parks](#) on archaeological landmarks in the West Bank, including in the village of al-Walaja and on Mounts Gerizim and [Ebal](#), between which Nablus is located. This represents “an Israeli piracy and assault that violated [international law and norms](#), which prohibit tampering with the monuments of the occupied territories.”

The division of the West Bank under the Oslo Accord into three zones (A, B, C) contributed to Israel’s control over archaeological sites and the looting of landmarks that are not supervised by Palestinians, especially in Area C, which is completely under Israel’s control and represents 60% of the West Bank, as well as the apartheid wall, which allowed for the seizure and destruction of dozens of archaeological sites.

Mohammad Jaradat, coordinator of archaeological data at the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, told Al-Monitor that according to the national list, which is to be published by the ministry once the parliament ratifies a new law on tourism and touristic sites, “There are approximately 7,000 archaeological sites in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, 53% of which are located in Area C and in which Palestinians are forbidden to conduct exploration, restoration and development.” Meanwhile, Israel has turned some of these landmarks into touristic sites, such as the caves of Qumran, north of the Dead Sea and “*Khirbet Susiya*” (“*Susya*”) in the city of Hebron, while settlers or artifact thieves steal from other sites. In addition, certain landmarks are given a religious character based on biblical narratives, according to Jaradat. This applies to Mount Ebal, where the altar of Joshua is said to be, and the Bilal bin Rabah Mosque (Rachel’s Tomb) in Hebron.

Israel resorts to biblical tales, like the exodus from Egypt and the journey to Palestine, for instance, and changes the names of archaeological Canaanite, Byzantine and Islamic sites to biblical names. Israel also claims that the tomb of Joseph at Nablus holds the relics of the Prophet Joseph.

“The settlers are setting up buildings close to the archaeological sites, toward which they are creeping up, in an attempt to control them in order to claim that they have a historical right over the Palestinian territories, where there are about 223 archaeological sites within the settlements in the West Bank, some subjected to total destruction—such as the Um al-Jamal site—and others partially destroyed to make way for the construction of settlements. This is in addition to the 1,100 archaeological landmarks ruined and destroyed by the erection of the wall,” said Jaradat.

“The settlers are taking control of the archaeological sites, which they believe to be linked to the biblical references, which they use as propaganda, and they take this as a pretext for them to build settlements and take over the land,” he added.

Palestinians are facing several problems as a result of the Israeli looting of the Palestinian archaeological landmarks. Tawafsha explained that the main obstacles to Palestine's management of tourist sites are represented by "Israel denying the Palestinian authorities access to archaeological sites located in Area C or behind the wall, which impedes providing the necessary protection from artifact thieves, and the monitoring of violations in order to submit them to international organizations, especially UNESCO, in addition to turning archaeological landmarks into touristic sites."

"The issue of archaeological sites is linked to the negotiations regarding borders and territories with Israel. Although we are not allowed access to these landmarks, which are being drained by Israel, the settlers and artifact traders, we call on UNESCO, of which we became a member, to pay attention to what is happening to our archaeological sites," said Jaradat.

Regarding Israel's narrative of the archaeological sites, director of tourism and antiquities in the Islamic Waqf in Al-Aqsa Mosque, Yousef Natsheh, told Al-Monitor, "Israel is exploiting these landmarks to serve its political objectives. Israeli institutions and departments collude to prove the biblical narrative about archaeological sites and support active right-wing associations, such as Elad association, to implement one-sided projects to marginalize the Palestinian-Arab side of the story and confirm the Zionist narrative."

Natsheh pointed out that Israel is earmarking significant budgets and conducting studies so as to control the [archaeological sites](#), give them a Jewish character and separate them from their Arab surroundings, as happened in the Moroccan Quarter, the Holy Basin and the Mount of Olives in [Jerusalem](#).

In light of the peace process falling flat and the continuation of Israel's control over the land, the Palestinian leadership relies on its [membership in UNESCO](#) in order to expose the Israeli violations. This was seen in practice in 2010 when [UNESCO condemned Israel's adding](#) the Cave of the Patriarchs (also known as the Ibrahimi Mosque) in Hebron and Rachel's Tomb (Bilal bin Rabah Mosque) in Bethlehem to the national heritage sites of Israel and considered it a violation of international law and UNESCO and UN resolutions. Despite the violations, though, UNESCO voted on giving the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and its pilgrimage route World Heritage status in June 2012, thus protecting the said site.

In light of the persistent Israeli violations on archaeological sites, thousands of human and historical relics of ancient civilizations that were, thousands of years ago, upon the land of Palestine are now [threatened with extinction](#), destruction or conversion.

"IDF CANCELS STATUS OF FIRING ZONE TO ENABLE EXPANSION OF NEARBY SETTLEMENT" (EXCERPTS)

This article was published by Haaretz on 8 March 2015. Author Chaim Levinson is a correspondent who covers Israeli settlements. The text is available at www.haaretz.com.

GOC Central Command Maj. Gen. Nitzan Alon signed an order in January canceling the status of an army firing zone in the Jordan Valley, which will allow for the expansion of the settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim. However, the army continues to demolish Palestinian homes in the Jordan Valley claiming they are in firing zones.

The area in question is called Firing Zone 912, which was declared a firing zone more than 40 years ago. It extends from Ma'aleh Adumim (east of Jerusalem) to the Dead Sea in the east and Umm Daraj in the south, and is still used by the Israel Defense Forces for training, particularly by the Armored Corps. There are a number of army bases in the area, including the Nabi Musa base.

On January 18, Alon signed an order reducing the size of the firing zone, which covers approximately 150 dunams (about 37 acres). There is a master plan for the area that earmarks it for the construction of dozens of housing units to expand Ma'aleh Adumim. Work has already begun in the area and a sign has been erected announcing the construction of 88 units in the area, called Nofei Adumim. [. . .]

Last May, *Haaretz* reported remarks by Col. Einav Shalev, the Central Command's operations officer—under whose aegis the firing zones fall—at a meeting of a subcommittee of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. Shalev said it was important to retain the firing zones at their full size, and that one of the main reasons the army trains in the Jordan Valley is because of the effect it has on “anyone who saw the last division exercise, with fighter jets, helicopters and tanks firing.” Shalev told the committee that the sight of armored battle vehicles and thousands of soldiers marching makes people “move aside.”

Shalev added: “There are places where we have thinned out the amount of training significantly, and small weeds have grown there. This is one of the reasons that we, as a military system, bring down much of the training to the Jordan Valley.”

Also last May, the IDF informed a number of Palestinian families in the firing zone, with whom it had been negotiating, that they had 48 hours to leave. In response to *Haaretz's* report on the matter, the army had said, “Firing Zone 912 was declared a closed military zone by the authority of GOC Central Command and was marked as such. The declaration of the closed firing zone was done in 1967, and it is in effect to this day because the area is still used by the IDF for military needs. Over the past week, the army issued evacuation orders to a number of residents living in the firing zone, whose presence there is illegal because of the fact that this is a closed military zone and their presence there endangers their safety. It is noted that the residents were offered alternative land in a place close to the firing zone.”

Last December, *Haaretz* reported that the Civil Administration had surveyed state lands in firing zones near settlements, ahead of future settlement expansion. The Civil Administration said at the time, “Any attempt to present the data as if they contain a political, or other, motive to allocate them in the future for settlement is completely baseless.”

However, researcher Dror Etkes, who is involved in a study of “closed areas” in the West Bank, told *Haaretz*, “This is another example of the fiction known as firing zones, which cover almost 1 million dunams in the West Bank. Most of them are not used by the army but constitute land reserves, of which Israel is gradually making use when it suits.”

“ISRAELI CELLULAR COMPANIES PAID TO SQUAT ON PALESTINIAN LAND”

This article was published by +972 Magazine on 14 April 2015. It was authored by the publication's managing editor, Michael Schaeffer Omer-Man. The text is available at www.972mag.com.

Israel's three major cellular companies, including the franchisee of Orange, paid rent to Israeli settlers who illegally established an outpost on privately owned Palestinian land, court documents show.

For 12 years, Orange franchisee Partner Communications, Cellcom and Pelephone paid approximately NIS 200,000 to Israeli settlers in the illegal West Bank outpost of Migron in order to place cellular antennas inside the settlement, [Walla News's Shabtai Bendet reported](#) Sunday.

Furthermore, the cellular companies built their towers without permits from the Israeli army, which is the effective sovereign in the West Bank, including planning and building issues.

The Israeli army [demolished all of the structures in Migron](#) earlier this year—save for the cellular towers—after a years-long court battle. The settlement itself was built on land owned by neighboring Palestinian villages, without permission and without authorization from Israeli authorities.

In other words, the three cellular companies, one of which pays franchise fees to a Paris based company that is [traded on the New York Stock Exchange](#), paid rent to Israeli settlers who were illegally squatting on Palestinian land—for 12 years.

It should be noted that all settlements are illegal under international law, a near-consensus understanding with which only Israel disagrees. This settlement, however, was illegal even under Israeli law.

Last year, the French government openly warned its citizens “not to engage in financial activity or investments in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank,” [Haaretz reported](#) at the time.

Considering that settlements are built on occupied land, doing business in them “could lead to a high likelihood of land disputes,” the French warning read. In the case of Migron, that likelihood was a certainty, one that the cellular companies should have been aware of, especially considering the fact that they were denied building permits to erect their antennas, but which they built nevertheless.

According to the Walla report, not only did the cellular companies not obtain the proper permits to build their towers, they even ignored Israeli army stop-work orders and continued construction.

The three companies are currently asking the Israeli courts to allow their antennas to remain on the illegally seized Palestinian land, arguing that they are necessary for security, Walla reported. The State has offered them alternative locations for their cellular antennas.

PALESTINIANS UNIONIZE IN WEST BANK SETTLEMENT

“PALESTINIAN WORKERS IN THE SETTLEMENTS UNITE”

This article, published by Al Jazeera on 9 April 2015, was written by freelance journalist Bethan Staton, who covers Palestine and Israel. The text is available at www.aljazeera.com.

Every day, Hatem Abu Ziadeh drives his yellow bus between the West Bank towns of Birzeit and Ramallah, taking a few shekels from each passenger. It is not an easy way to make a living, and Abu Ziadeh says supporting his six children is getting more difficult every day.

Abu Ziadeh has not always worked as a driver. A trained mechanic, until recently he worked at Zarfaty Garage in the Jewish West Bank settlement of Mishor Adumim. He was good at his job, which he had held for 17 years.

But last summer, he received a hearing notice signaling the termination of his contract. A few weeks and a slew of accusations later, he was unemployed.

Abu Ziadeh thinks he knows why he was dismissed. He is the leader of a union of Zarfaty's Palestinian workers, which had escalated its struggle to improve conditions at the garage. WAC-MAAN, the Israeli union that the garage employees are working with, also believes two other workers have lost their jobs because of union activity.

"Whoever signed up for the union is not a good worker now," Nidal Rostom, a Zarfaty worker and union supporter who has also been dismissed, told Al Jazeera. "He's a problem."

Rostom and Abu Ziadeh both became locked in a legal battle to return to work. After a lengthy court case, Rostom was recently able to return to work. For the union, it was a huge victory that dramatically increased workers' confidence and support. But it is also the latest stage of a drama that has been developing for some time.

Zarfaty's staff first organised in 2013, working with WAC-MAAN for basic rights, such as a minimum wage and paid sick leave. Over time, the management gradually improved conditions. But when workers made further demands and went to court over strike-breaking, things started to go wrong.

"We came to a point where things were completely legal. And we said there are more issues here: Every employee had the minimum wage, so we asked for a pay scale, and also that he needed to pay the debt he owed to his workers," Yoav Tamir, WAC-MAAN's Jerusalem branch secretary, told Al Jazeera.

At this point, Tamir says, the garage's management "started a war": Abu Ziadeh received a hearing notice, and in response the workers went on strike.

When the garage was challenged in court, events took a more sinister turn: Company representatives accused Abu Ziadeh of being a security threat—sabotaging the military vehicles he was hired to fix.

As a result, Abu Ziadeh's permit to enter Mishor Adumim—essential for his ability to work—was revoked. Police have since dismissed the accusations that Abu Ziadeh was a security threat, but a new permit was never secured, and eventually he was dismissed entirely.

Of the 70 to 80 workers at the garage, around 45—all Palestinian—have now joined the union. They are protesting against inequalities experienced by many Palestinians who work in settlements and within Israel, often for fewer benefits than their Israeli counterparts, even though the minimum wage for both groups is the same.

"There are not many Israelis that would like to work in these jobs . . . Palestinian workers are reliable and have lower labour costs in terms of social security and so on," Robey Nathanson, director general of the Macro Centre of Political Economics in Tel Aviv, told Al Jazeera.

Nevertheless, Nathanson views many of the challenges faced by settlement workers—such as fear of dismissal—as common to all employees. "This is the case anywhere; it has nothing to do with the West Bank, or with occupation. It's based on labour relations more generally."

Tamir believes that this case, however, and especially the accusations against Abu Ziadeh, demonstrate a particularly dramatic inequality experienced by Palestinian workers in settlements. "Here we have an officer in the army, a high-ranking officer, who gets a piece of land for cheap. And some of his job, a big part, comes from the army," Tamir explained. "He doesn't have to pay his workers minimum wage or benefits. But when the cheap labour he uses starts unionising, he goes to the army to accuse them of being terrorists."

Zarfaty's management did not respond to requests for comment on this case. The garage ownership denies that any dismissals were political: In court, they argued that many more non-unionised workers were dismissed in recent months due to cost-cutting measures.

For union member Hasan Jelayta, however, the ease with which employers can dispense with workers only shows how important organising is. He believes the inequality inherent in settlements makes it easy for employers to exploit their workforce. He said that recently being prevented from returning to work at the garage after a period of ill health has only confirmed that feeling.

"There is an imbalance of power between the two sides. We need to ask, who needs whom?" he told Al Jazeera. "The Palestinian needs the work. He can be replaced easily—most employers can find another worker. The settler is in a very strong position and the Palestinian worker living under the occupation is in a very weak position, under a lot of stress when it comes to getting any job."

Rostom agrees that the union is crucial to securing rights for workers. Last month, after seeing a petition from the garage's workers, the judge hearing his case said he should return to work. He is now back on the garage floor.

"Before they used to work out everything between the individual workers and the employer. If there was a problem, they'd say, 'Fine, take some work, take some cash, whatever.' They tried to break the workers apart," he said.

"Since there's a union, they've had to talk with the union and therefore everyone," Rostom added. "The owner has to deal with the problem—he has to talk to us with respect."

The enthusiasm for unionising is spreading across Mishor Adumim, beyond the garage. At the beginning of this year, workers at an aluminum plant in the settlement unionised with WAC-MAAN. The workers involved know it will be an uphill battle to fight for their rights, and that unionizing—especially with an Israeli organization—comes with a huge set of challenges.

Zarfaty, for example, has tried to undermine the union's work by framing it as political. But workers hope this could be the start of a new chapter for organising.

"One worker alone is weak, because the owner is the one that makes the decisions, who's in control. The worker is afraid," Abu Ziadeh explained.

"But when the workers join hand-in-hand as one person together, there won't be a possibility for the owner to play one against the other. If he's trying to fire a worker who's from the union he will have to think very carefully, because he knows he will get a response—from all of us."