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Collective Punishment in Beit Sahur

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there is inferior and unclear. In daily language they are referred to as "local inhabitants," they are citizens of a foreign country (Jordan, according to Sharon and Shamir is the state of the Palestinians), subjects of an enemy country; within the borders of Israel they have the status of absentees, and if they happen to have property in East Jerusalem the Israeli state may legally confiscate it.

The West Bank has not been officially annexed, but the Israeli settlement policy deprives [the Arabs] theoretically, and of course practically, of being citizens in the region, like their neighbours in the settlements. This seems to be a creeping annexation policy, but in many ways it is also the realization of Rabbi Kahana's slogan: "Zion for the Zionists, Arabia for the Arabs."

We have shown some examples from the field of construction, but it is in other spheres of civil rights as well that the Israeli settlement policy determines a different and privileged status to Israelis in the West Bank over the Arab inhabitants. For example, the immigration policy: while there are constant efforts to bring more Israelis to live permanently in the West Bank, local Arabs who have been abroad have great difficulties in returning to live. The civilian administration in the West Bank has committees for family reunions (for Arabs only, of course) with contradictory criteria, which they refuse to disclose, according to which they operate. The same goes for employment policies, development and services, everything in fact.

The privileged Israeli inhabitants in the West Bank are a symbol of social and moral discrimination; they are creating there a masters' regime and that is the high price of the settlements.

COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT IN BEIT SAHUR

Another aspect of Israeli policy in the occupied territories is the application of

collective punishment. This may take the form of curfews or other penalties imposed on entire communities, or, as in the case described below, the dynamiting of a family home when one of its members is suspected of an act or acts hostile to the occupying power. In the principal case described, the arrested member of the family is a 15-year-old boy; the dynamiting of his home as a punishment for the suspected offence left 37 people homeless.

This case was presented in an article by Jerusalem Post reporter Benny Morris, which appeared in the November 22, 1981 edition of that paper. It is here reprinted in its entirety:

A group of some 40 Israeli intellectuals and Peace Now Movement activists went to Beit Sahur on Friday afternoon to pay a condolence call at the traditionally tranquil Christian West Bank town where three houses were blown up by the military government last Monday.

The Israelis spoke to the families who owned two of the demolished houses and to Mayor Hanna al-Atrash.

And yesterday, former foreign minister Abba Eban told an audience at the Jerusalem Theatre that the demolitions were a desecration of the Tora and a flagrant violation of the principles of civilization and law that did violence to all human rights.

The destruction of homes, the Labour leader said, fostered enmity between Israel and its neighbours and would weigh heavily upon the peace process.

Eban cited two scriptural passages to support his argument. One insisting that Jews and the foreigners living among them are equal before the law, and the other that it is the individual who must bear the punishment for his actions.

Replying to charges that Labour, too, had demolished homes, Eban said he had always opposed the policy and it had long ago been halted. Israelis must work out a way of living together with Arabs until

such time, devoutly to be hoped for, when Israelis can free themselves of the yoke of ruling over a million and a quarter Arabs, Eban said.

In Beit Sahur, Mattia Abu Eita, a building worker, showed the visitors the concrete and stone slabs that are all that remain of his two-storey home, and the two tents which now house his family. His 15-year-old son is one of the youths being held by the security forces on suspicion of throwing a makeshift petrol bomb at an Israeli vehicle.

"What am I to do with him," said Abu Eita, pointing to his 88-year-old, white-bearded grandfather, bent over a cane, his face showing a bewilderment beyond pain.

"Is this peace?" Abu Eita asked.

"The shame of it," muttered one professor, "the shame"

"It took me 20 years to build this house; it took them one second to put me, my wife, my children and my grandfather in these tents," said Abu Eita.

Members of the family sat hunched on plain wooden chairs inside the narrow tents. Under three plastic sheets nearby was the furniture they had managed to salvage and remove before the demolition.

Earlier, the Israelis had expressed their sorrow for the military government's actions to al-Atrash.

The mayor said that the dynamiting had left 37 persons homeless. "The military government has told us that the

owners will not be allowed to build new homes on their lots."

Al-Atrash said that Beit Sahur had been under curfew when the houses were dynamited and the military had cut off all telephone communications. He had been unable to phone West Bank civilian administrator Menahem Milson to obtain a postponement. "We just sat in our homes and heard the bangs, one at midnight, another at 2 a.m., the last at 4 o'clock."

The mayor charged that the security forces have not yet allowed any of the 11 arrested youths to see a lawyer. "It's unheard of," commented Professor Arye Dvoretzky. "Look what the occupation has brought us to!"

Al-Atrash said that he accepted the jurisdiction of the military government and courts. "But surely a person is innocent until proven guilty. The military should first have tried the youngsters. If they are found guilty, then let them be punished. But why punish before the trial, and why punish whole families for what one 15-year-old may have done?"

The Israelis were then shown the demolished home of Abdel Wahad Mussa Mohammed Odde, a Bethlehem shop-owner whose family became refugees in 1948, when they fled Esleen, an Arab village near present-day Beit Shemesh.

Odde claimed that all his money had gone into the house.

His daughter said 21 of their family are now homeless....