

# MÉDICOS DEL MUNDO

WE COMBAT EVERY ILLNESS, INCLUDING INJUSTICE

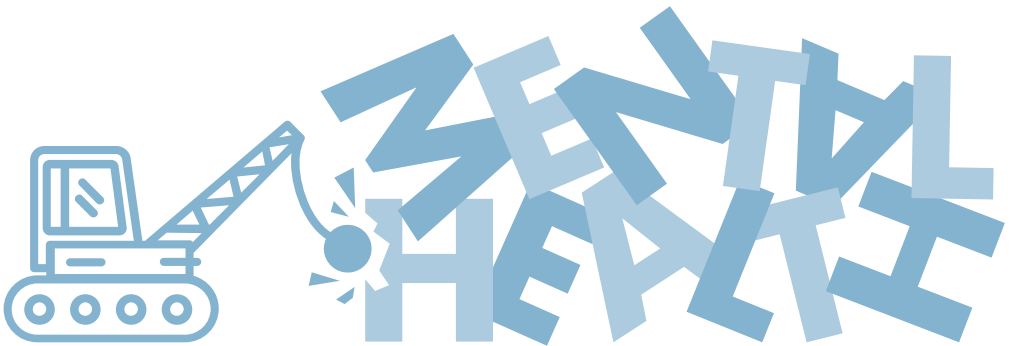


PHOTO: OCHA OPT

## DEMOLISHING MENTAL HEALTH

The 2016 wave of demolitions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem  
and its impact on the Palestinian population's mental health

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# Background

A central theme in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is the demolition of homes and other buildings coupled with the forced displacement of Palestinian population that is taking place in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Since its occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem began in 1967, Israel has been pursuing a policy aimed at expanding its Israeli settlements through displacement of the Palestinian population, with the ultimate objective of annexing the Palestine territory. The Palestinian population's vulnerability stems largely from the occupation policies and the violation of its rights that is the seizing of Palestinian land for the building and expansion of Israeli settlements.

Under the framework of the 1993 Oslo Accords, the West Bank was divided into three administrative areas<sup>1</sup>: A, B and C, with Area C exclusively under Israel's control. Although this division was established as a temporary measure, it remains in place over 20 years later and has allowed Israel to make constant breaches of international humanitarian law.

Area C covers approximately 60% of the West Bank area, is home to around 297,900 people<sup>2</sup> and includes the largest reserve of land in all the West Bank. The socio-economic development of this area and respect for the rights of the Palestinian population are of fundamental importance to the viability of the future State of Palestine.

Living conditions in Area C are extremely poor due to the limited access to natural resources and basic services, the

economic sanctions imposed, and the forced displacements driven by Israel's policy of expanding its settlements. This is a policy that brings increased seizures and demolitions of Palestinian homes and other buildings (actions justified by Israel's restrictions on construction activities and denial of permits), military exercises conducted close to residential areas, violence from settlers and the rescinding of residency rights.

In 2016, the number of critical incidents doubled, in particular the demolitions of infrastructure and seizures of property in Area C and East Jerusalem. These critical violent incidents are traumatic experiences that have serious psychosocial impacts on the people and communities affected, deprived of their homes and means of subsistence and separated from their lands, families, education, etc. It is a situation made even worse by the violence against women and girls that is suffered against a backdrop of deep-set gender inequalities.

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<sup>1</sup>Area A: Palestinian civil and military control; Area B: Palestinian civil control and Israeli military control; Area C: Israeli civil and military control (OCHA, 2011).

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_fact\\_sheet\\_5\\_3\\_2014\\_en.pdf](https://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_fact_sheet_5_3_2014_en.pdf)

# The psychosocial impact of demolitions and forced displacement

## FROM THE DEMOLITION ORDER UNTIL THE FORCED DISPLACEMENT: A LENGTHY AND STRESSFUL PROCESS FOR THE COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

The time it takes from when the order to cease works (in certain cases) or to demolish buildings is received until the moment the demolition actually takes place can be years. During this time, the families affected experience insecurity, uncertainty and stress, something that worsens when their legal cases are rejected and they know they could be evicted at any time.

Very often, the evictions take place first thing in the morning. Israeli security forces come into the community and pull down and/or take by force the structures referred to in the order. Those affected are often left without time to move their livestock to safety or to gather personal belongings.

Following the demolitions, the families have to recover their livestock and belongings from the ruins of their homes and work out how to meet their basic needs, such as water, food and a roof over their heads. Although they may receive help from NGOs or family support networks, these solutions

can generate instability and tensions (overcrowding of relatives' houses, etc.)

Some families endure numerous demolitions, their tents or shelters being confiscated a series of times by the Israeli authorities, thus they are made to relive the same traumatic situation over and over. Some lose the infrastructure they need to survive and suffer economic hardship, others end up leaving and lose contact with their support network, and children are witness to their schools and other local buildings being torn down.

There is no doubt that the current wave of demolitions is resulting in negative psychosocial effects on the communities affected, in the short, medium and long term. This is especially true with regards to children, who are particularly vulnerable due to their need for safety and protection.

Each individual experiences the same incident in their own separate way. As

A critical incident is a potentially traumatic event to which each person and community reacts in a particular way, affecting the psychosocial well-being of the individual, family and/or community. In the case of the Bedouin communities located in Area C of the West Bank and Area E1 of East Jerusalem, any violent act committed by persons or institutions not part of their community are considered critical incidents.

Argentinian Ministry of Health, (2015). *Salud Mental: Recomendaciones para la Intervención ante Situaciones de Emergencias y Desastres*. [Mental Health: Recommendations for Intervention in Emergency and Disaster Situations]. Adapted by MdM.

such, the symptoms and problems that appear can be very diverse, and can vary according to age, gender and a range of socioeconomic factors. Notable among the most common reactions are:

- Social problems (e.g. estrangement, increases in conflicts and violence within communities, difficulties getting through day-to-day life, at work, in school and with social life).
- Psychosomatic problems (e.g. physical ill-health, insomnia, stunted childhood growth, bedwetting and faecal soiling).
- Psychological problems (e.g. anxiety, depression, stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger, rage, fear, aggression, hyperactivity, desperation and suicidal thoughts).

Many of the families affected describe it in words such as these:

**“ There’s no sense to life. Living like this is completely pointless.”**

21-year-old woman

**“ My son’s begun acting more aggressively and being moody. He talks about the last demolition a lot and his school marks have started to drop. He’s always distracted and constantly feels threatened. He’s always afraid.”**

40-year-old woman talking about her 19-year-old son

**“ My children aren’t eating or drinking enough. They’re always thinking about the next demolition. The whole family is in fear, in a torpor.”**

50-year-old woman

**“ My children have started getting nightmares and they often cry out in the night. In the morning, they look sad and tired.”**

33-year-old woman

# MÉDICOS DEL MUNDO INTERVENTIONS IN AREA C AND EAST JERUSALEM

Médicos del Mundo has been active in Palestine since 2006, working on improving public mental health services in terms of both quality and access. Since 2014, it has been working on improving the resilience of the 39 Bedouin communities affected or at risk of being affected by the critical incidents happening in the governorate of Jericho (Area C) and East Jerusalem (Area E1).

The work Médicos del Mundo performs with Bedouin communities in Area C of the West Bank (essentially those located in the governorate of Jericho) and Area E1 of East Jerusalem is aimed at increasing their resilience and mitigating the effects of political violence on the psychosocial well-being of the people and communities affected.

Médicos del Mundo works in Bedouin communities affected by critical incidents and/or violence following a single strategy with complementary actions. One element is its activities aimed at improving psychosocial well-being, which entails taking action prior to critical and/or violent incidents in order to limit the psychosocial impact of stressful and potentially traumatic experiences, always looking to strengthen people's resource capabilities.

Another aspect is the emergency protocol, a rapid action procedure designed for immediate intervention following a critical or violent incident. In this case, the assistance provided comes in the form of emergency psychosocial care.

While the fear that their homes and other structures may be demolished and their possessions taken is ever-present in the lives of Bedouin communities, 2016 was notable for an alarming increase in this type of occurrence. Over the course of 2016, the OCHA in the occupied Palestinian territory recorded a total of 1,196 demolitions<sup>3</sup> of infrastructure and seizures of property in the two regions where Médicos del Mundo works – 593 in Area C and 603 in Area E1. This figure represents almost twice as many demolitions as those that took place in 2015 and the highest number since 2009<sup>4</sup>, the year when the OCHA first started monitoring the demolitions.

From January to December 2016, in the 39 communities in the governorates of Jericho (Area C) and East Jerusalem (Area E1) which Médicos del Mundo works with, there were a total of 41 critical incidents, affecting 909 people: 366 adults and 543 children. It is worth remembering that in one single demolition, various different pieces of infrastructure may be destroyed and/or seized. It is also possible for the same structure to suffer numerous demolitions, as happened at the Abu Nuwar community's school.

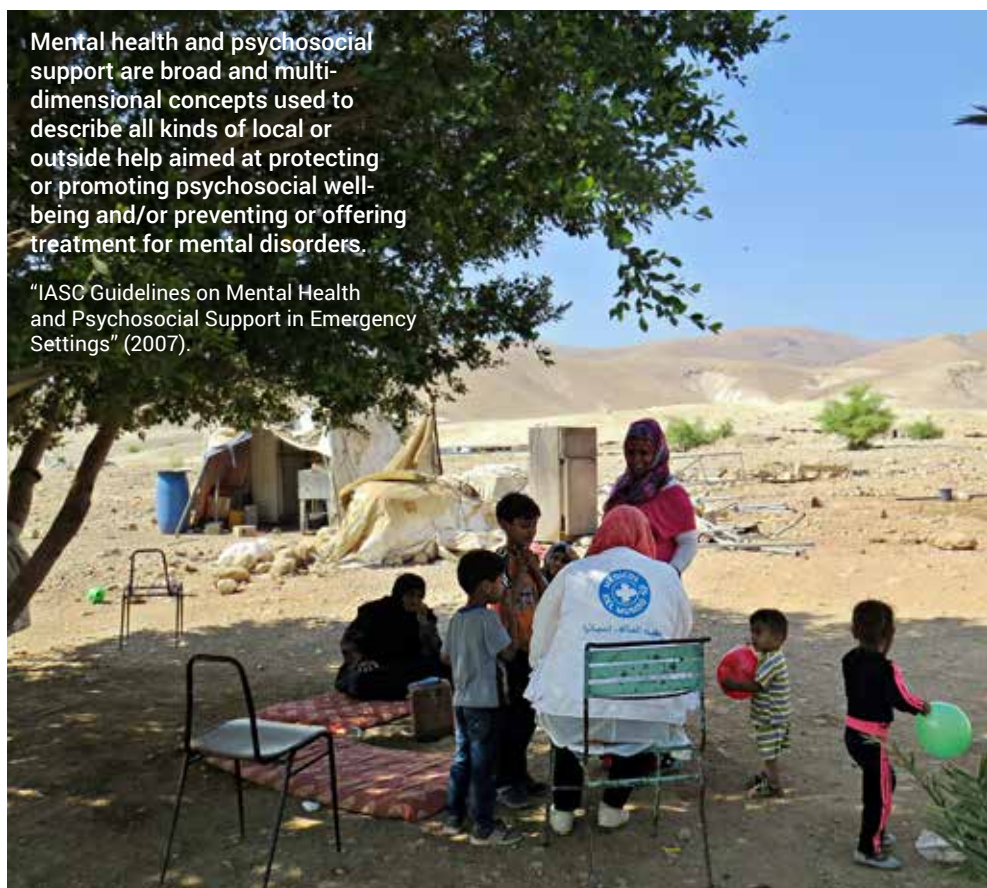
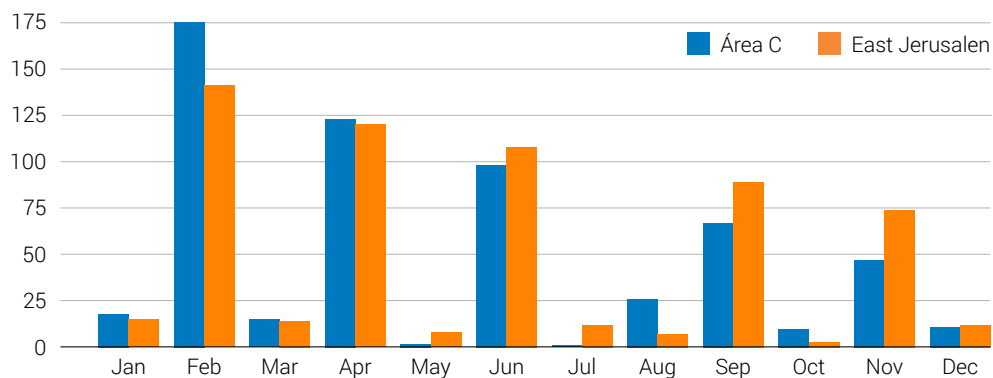
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<sup>3</sup><http://data.ochaopt.org/dbs/demolition/login.aspx>

<sup>4</sup>Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; Report to the Ad hoc Liaison Committee, 2016



## Demolitions and seizures in Area C and East Jerusalem in 2016.



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## THREE DEMOLITIONS OF ABU NUWAR'S SCHOOL IN ONE YEAR

Abu Nuwar is a Bedouin community in East Jerusalem. Its 100 families make up a population of around 600 people, half of whom are minors.

Abu Nuwar's school consists of a nursery and three classrooms for grades 1 to 3. It has a total of 62 children aged between 4 and 9 years old. The school is in Area C, located between the illegal settlements of Ma'ale Adumim and Kedar in an area that is included in the expansion plan for the Ma'ale Adumim illegal settlement, the third largest in the West Bank.

The school had been the subject of a demolition order since the start of 2015 but it did not become effective until 2016, when the school suffered various demolitions and seizures of school materials. In just eight months, the children of Abu Nuwar saw the army demolish parts of their school on three

separate occasions. The first critical incident took place on 21 February 2016, when Israeli security forces demolished almost all of the school: three classrooms, the kitchen, three latrines and the teachers' room. They also seized school materials such as chairs and desks. Following these demolitions, the community managed to get the school up and running again using caravans donated by an NGO. On 27 September, the army returned and demolished the caravan being used by the third grade, leaving ten 9-year-olds without a classroom. Once more the community found a solution, using a tent to enable classes to continue. However, little over a week later, on 5 October, the Israeli army came back again and seized the tent that was acting as a classroom. But again the community set about finding a space where the third grade could continue receiving classes, this time converting the town's barbershop into a schoolroom.





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The demolition order on the school continues to stand and the families know that it is very likely the Israeli army will come back to the school to destroy their classrooms. Even though all of the demolitions and seizures have been carried out in the early hours of the morning, the children live in constant fear that the army will show up to pull down their school while they are in class.

**“ I don't know what I'd do if the Israeli army came while we were in class. How would we protect the children during the demolition?”**

Teacher

According to their teacher, the effects on the children's health are visible day-to-day; following the demolitions, she notes how they are hyperactive, fearful, anxious and easily distracted.

**“ Every time they hear the sound of a car, they're afraid it's the army, and the children in the third grade – who have seen how their classroom was demolished three times – are constantly asking if the army's going to come while they're in class.”**

Teacher

# Response from the international community

For decades, the international community has been condemning Israel's policy of expansion into occupied Palestine territory and its systematic breaches of international law.

As an occupying power, Israel is responsible for the well-being of the Palestinian population. Its demolitions and seizures of Palestinian property and its forced displacement of Palestinian communities are violations of both international humanitarian law – applicable in occupied Palestinian territory – and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

The demolitions are inextricably linked to the expansion of the settlements. This also represents a violation of international humanitarian law – which prohibits an occupying force from transferring its population into the occupied territory – and threatens the viability of the future State of Palestine.

Both the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Human Rights Council – as well as some of the independent experts of the latter such as its Special Rapporteur

on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967 and its Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living – have made clear statements of their concerns over the violations of the Palestinian population's human rights and the impact the expansion of the settlements has on Palestinian communities at risk of forced displacement.

However, it was not until December 2016 that the United Nations Security Council adopted for the first time a resolution in which it condemned Israel for its policy of displacing the Palestinian population from its own territory.

Resolution 2334, adopted on 23 December, reaffirms that the establishment of settlements in the West Bank “constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace”.

Israel responded almost immediately, its government announcing plans a few weeks later to build 6,000 new homes in the West Bank.

Whether third states and international organisations will be capable of using Resolution 2334 as a means to make headway on the human rights of the Palestinian population and the objective of the two-state solution remains to be seen.

However, it is important to remember that third states are legally obliged to ensure Israel respects international humanitarian law. Various European countries, Spain included, have condemned both Israel's settlements policy and its announcement at the start of January 2017, with reference to Resolution 2334. But little else has been done.

***The Security Council (...) Condemning all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, including, inter alia, the construction and expansion of settlements, transfer of Israeli settlers, confiscation of land, demolition of homes and displacement of Palestinian civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law and relevant resolutions.***

UN Resolution 2334 (2016), adopted by the Security Council on 23 December 2016.



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# POLITICAL RESPONSE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union has taken a clear position, considering the demolitions, land seizures and forced displacements of the Palestinian population as violations of international law.

Particular importance is attached to the European Parliament resolution of July 2012 on EU policy on the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

**“International human rights and humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, is fully applicable to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip; whereas Israel is obliged, inter alia, to ensure in good faith that the basic needs of the occupied Palestinian population are met, administer its occupation in a manner that benefits the local population, protect and preserve civilian objects, and avoid the transfer of its own population into the occupied territory as well as of the population of the occupied territory into its own territory;”**

European Parliament resolution, of 5 July 2014, on EU policy on the West Bank and East Jerusalem (2012/2694(RSP)).

The rising number of demolitions and Israel's renewed push in its settlements policy since 2014 has led the EU to increase its actions. Towards the end of 2014, the Political and Security Committee of the Council of the EU adopted a note on the worsening of the humanitarian situation in Area C, and in September 2015 the European External Action Service initiated a six-month dialogue with Israel, entitled the 'structured dialogue', on the demolition of EU-funded humanitarian infrastructure in Area C and other issues important for the preservation of the two-state solution. However, in November 2015, Israel suspended the structured dialogue with the EU in response to the EU's publication of instructions for the correct labelling of products that come from the settlements.

In December 2015, the EU and its Member States made a commitment to request compensation from Israel if the structured dialogue failed to bring to a halt the demolitions of buildings and property they had financed. In 2016, the demolitions and seizures of EU-funded infrastructure increased.

The implementation of these initiatives could be taken as a sign of the EU's commitment towards respect for international humanitarian law in the



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occupied Palestinian territory, but the truth of the matter is that the EU has not taken measures to demand compensation from the state of Israel. And what is even more concerning is that the EU and its Member States are still yet to come to a consensus on the measures to take to get Israel to respect international law.

The only measure that has been agreed was to impose a temporary suspension on Israel's request to improve the EU-

Israel bilateral agreement, a minimal measure when taking into account that the European Union and its Member States are privileged partners of Israel, allowing room for manoeuvre and negotiation.

Spain backed the position taken by the EU and the UN Security Council's Resolution 2334, also criticising Israel's settlements policy, but it has failed to offer any leadership.

# Recommendations

We remind the European Union and its Member States that the forcible transfer of Bedouin communities is a violation of both international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the deportation of civilians from an occupied territory. It is also a violation of fundamental human rights, for instance the right to housing, guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

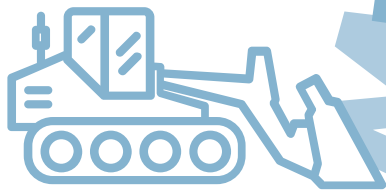
## Thus, we demand that the European Union

- takes effective measures to ensure compliance with the provisions agreed by the EU and to bring to an end the demolitions and displacements of Bedouin communities, the legalisation of settlement outposts, and the expansion of settlements carried out by the Israeli government;
- insists that the Israeli authorities protect the Bedouin communities in the West Bank (Area C) and East Jerusalem (Area E1) and respect their rights, the EU condemning any violations, including forcible transfers and the demolition of homes;
- addresses the continuous breaches of Bedouin communities' rights in Area C, in particular the increased demolitions, within the bilateral relations between the European Union and Israel. As a privileged partner of Israel, principally through the Association Agreement between the European Union and Israel, the former must demand that the latter respects human rights and democratic principles (Article 2).

## We demand that the Spanish Government

- recognises unilaterally and without preconditions the State of Palestine, as requested in the non-legislative motion on recognition of the State of Palestine presented in the Spanish parliament on 9 February 2016;
- accepts the role of leading the European Union and its Member States from within towards taking a more active approach, improving the coordination of their actions in order to demand protection of the rights of the Palestinian population in occupied Palestinian territory and to initiate concrete measures to exert pressure on Israel.





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