



Fact Sheet: Crimes Against Housing and Agriculture

In addition to the massive destruction in Jenin and Nablus during Israel's April 2002 military offensive in the West Bank, Israeli occupying forces regularly destroy Palestinian property in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), "cleansing" land of Palestinians and sometimes later appropriating it for either army or settler use. The extensive, unlawful, and wanton destruction or expropriation of property not justified by military necessity is a **war crime** under the Fourth Geneva Convention.¹

- Israel often claims that Palestinians use houses and land as bases from which to attack Israeli military posts and illegal settlements. Yet most destruction of property in the Gaza strip mostly takes place **without any judicial process**, including presentation of evidence, adequate warning, or opportunity for appeal. In some refugee camps, swathes of houses have been destroyed to create "**buffer zones**" between Israeli army positions and Palestinian areas. Israeli forces also demolish houses of alleged "terrorists" or their families, even though **collective punishment** is prohibited by the Convention.²
- Israeli occupation forces have **demolished at least 560 housing units** in the Gaza strip during the al-Aqsa Intifada, rendering thousands of Palestinians homeless.³ Often, families are woken in the middle of the night to find an Israeli army bulldozer outside and given minutes to collect whatever belongings they can before the demolition begins. The destruction of a house and its contents is a crushing economic blow for most Palestinians, from which financial recovery is almost impossible.
- The Israeli Supreme Court in March 2002 **chose to legalise house demolitions** in the OPT rather than ban them, while ruling that the army must give an opportunity for appeal. Israeli forces have since demolished a number of houses without warning, however, in violation of the Supreme Court ruling.
- House demolitions are also carried out by Israeli authorities in occupied east Jerusalem. These demolitions are often justified on the pretext that such houses were built without a proper permit, even though discriminatory building regulations make obtaining a permit almost impossible for Palestinians.
- Israeli occupation forces have **razed approximately 16,000 donums⁴ of land in the Gaza strip**, most of it agricultural, during the al-Aqsa Intifada, or approximately 9% of the total arable land of the Gaza strip, crippling the livelihoods of thousands of farmers. This often entails the destruction of trees, greenhouses, wells, irrigation networks, and storage facilities. Even if hostilities were to cease immediately, restoring this land to full agricultural use would take years.

¹ Article 147. Also: "Any destruction of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons, or to the State, or other public authorities, or social or cooperative organizations, is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations" (Article 53).

² "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism of are prohibited. ... Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited" (Article 33).

³ The statistics in this document cover the period from 28 September 2000 to 31 March 2002 and exclude partially demolished homes and homes damaged or destroyed by shelling or bombardment.

⁴ One donum is 1,000 square meters.