



The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

Uprooting Palestinian Trees And Leveling Agricultural Land



The **tenth** Report on Israeli Land Sweeping and Demolition of
Palestinian Buildings and Facilities in the Gaza Strip

1 April, 2003 – 30 April, 2004



The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

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Consultative Status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations
Affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists – Geneva
Member of the International Federation for Human Rights – Paris
The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network

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Introduction

This is the tenth in a series of reports published by PCHR on Israeli land sweeping and demolition of Palestinian buildings and facilities in the Gaza Strip. Since the beginning of the current al-Aqsa Intifada on 29 September 2000, Israeli occupying forces have systematically razed areas of Palestinian agricultural land and destroyed houses and civilian facilities throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).

According to PCHR's documentation, over the period under study, 1 April 2003 – 30 April 2004,¹ Israeli occupying forces razed 6424 donums² of Palestinian agricultural land and destroyed dozens of irrigation networks, water pumps, beehives, animal and bird farms, agricultural stores, fences of farms and tin-made houses in the Gaza Strip. Also during this reporting period, Israeli occupying forces totally demolished 803 Palestinian houses and damaged hundreds of others in the Gaza Strip, rendering nearly 6554 Palestinian civilians (about 950 families) homeless.³ These houses were demolished without any prior warning and without allowing the families to vacate any of their belongings.

From the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada until 30 April 2004, Israeli occupying forces razed a total of 22892 donums of agricultural land in the Gaza Strip. This constitutes approximately 14.6% of the total area of agricultural land in the Gaza Strip. In the same period, Israeli occupying forces demolished 1867 houses completely, rendering 16497 Palestinian civilians (2371 families) homeless.

The Rafah town and refugee camp, located in the south of the Gaza Strip adjacent to the border with Egypt, have been the focus of the Israeli military house demolition policy in the OPT. From the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada until 30 April 2004, Israeli occupying forces demolished 1059 Palestinian houses in Rafah. Several thousand Palestinian homes were also damaged, many of which were rendered uninhabitable. Hundreds of families have been rendered homeless. During this reporting period, Israeli occupying forces totally demolished 487 houses in Rafah, approximately 46% of the total number

¹ PCHR published 8 previous reports on Israeli land Sweeping and demolition of Palestinian buildings and facilities in the Gaza Strip that covered the period 29 September 2000 – 31 March 2003. For further information, see PCHR's webpage: www.pchrgaza.org.

² 1 donum is equal to 1000 square meters.

³ This number does not include 23 houses belonging to families of Palestinians who carried out or facilitated armed attacks against Israeli targets, which were demolished by Israeli occupying forces over the period under study.

of houses demolished in the town since the beginning of the current Intifada. Most of these demolitions were conducted in areas of Rafah which are located along the border with Egypt, in the west of Rafah and near "Morag" settlement, north of the town.

On Sunday morning, 26 October 2004, Israeli occupying forces destroyed 3 apartment buildings that contained 156 flats in al-Zahra town, opposite to "Netzarim" settlement south of Gaza City. Israeli occupying forces planted explosives inside these buildings and destroyed them, which marked a significant escalation in acts of house demolitions conducted by Israeli occupying forces in the OPT since the beginning of the current Intifada.

The northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Hanoun has been the focus of the Israeli military land leveling policy in the OPT. Israeli occupying forces imposed a tightened siege on the town from 15 May to 30 June 2003, during which they demolished dozens of houses, razed large areas of agricultural land and largely destroyed the civilian infrastructure of the town.

The ongoing Israeli military policy of land-leveling and confiscation has resulted in a major reduction in agricultural production throughout the OPT. Since agricultural activities are the primary source of income for Palestinians, particularly in the Gaza Strip, the decline in agricultural production has impacted not only the availability of production for the domestic market, but it has also impacted on the wider economic development of the OPT.

The Israeli military policies of land leveling and house demolition have also had a disastrous impact on the environment, including water resources, in the Gaza Strip. Israeli occupying forces have destroyed a large number of wells and water networks, contaminating water supplies, and have also prohibited the establishment of new wells. Furthermore, they have destroyed or damaged sewage treatment and waste disposal infrastructure. They have also destroyed many animal and bird farms and beehives. Israeli occupying forces have stolen sands from the agricultural land that was razed and transported them to Israel, which may contribute to the desertification of the Gaza Strip.

PCHR contends that destruction of Palestinian agricultural resources, including uprooting of trees, destruction of crops, leveling of, and denial of access to agricultural land and the demolition of Palestinian homes and other facilities are imposed by the Israeli occupying forces as a form of collective punishment against the wider Palestinian population. Israeli occupying forces often claim that these operations are conducted for security reasons, that foliage and properties destroyed provide cover for attacks on Israeli targets in OPT. However, evidence is rarely provided to support such claims and the

scale on which these operations take place, the lack of warning, failure to provide compensation, and the force with which these operations are often conducted do not support Israeli claims. Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilian property can be interpreted only in terms of collective punishment against the Palestinian civilian population. They constitute illegal actions whose perpetrators must be prosecuted. The Israeli military focus on the Palestinian agricultural sector apparently aims at the destruction of this sector, which is the cornerstone of the Palestinian economy.

The Policy of Land Leveling and House Demolition

Israel always justifies land leveling and house demolition as military necessities, which in fact are never substantiated. According to PCHR's investigations, land leveling and house demolition are not military necessities, rather they are penal measures against Palestinian civilians, that seek to seize more Palestinian land and create buffer zones along border area and near settlements and bypass roads.

Land leveling and house demolition carried out by Israeli occupying forces violate international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israeli occupying forces often raze agricultural land and demolish houses without warning and without granting Palestinian owners enough time to appeal against these actions. In the few cases where owners of houses were given short periods of time, PCHR and other human rights organization appealed against such actions. However, these appeals were rarely taken into consideration by the Israeli army, and failed to provide full protection for house owners against house demolition carried out by Israel.

In the majority of cases, Israeli occupying forces impose an atmosphere of terror during land leveling and house and civilian facility demolition. Israeli occupying forces, reinforced with tanks and bulldozers, regularly encroach into targeted areas at night. They fire flash bombs and live ammunition, in an apparent attempt to force civilians to evacuate the area. They then raze land or demolish houses, leaving civilians with no choice but to leave the area and abandon their property.

Israeli occupying forces often claim that Palestinians use those lands and houses in carrying out attacks against Israeli soldiers and settlers, although Palestinian resistance activities in such areas have sharply decreased. In many cases, Israeli occupying forces destroyed Palestinian civilian properties in areas which were completely quiet and did not witness any attack against Israeli soldiers or settlers.

Land Leveling

Over the period under study, 1 April 2003 – 30 April 2004, Israeli occupying forces razed approximately 6424 dunums of Palestinian agricultural land and destroyed 357 irrigation networks, 102 wells, 65 greenhouses and 46 water pumps.

Table (1)
Destruction of Agricultural Land and Facilities by Israeli Occupying Forces
1 April 2003 – 30 April 2004

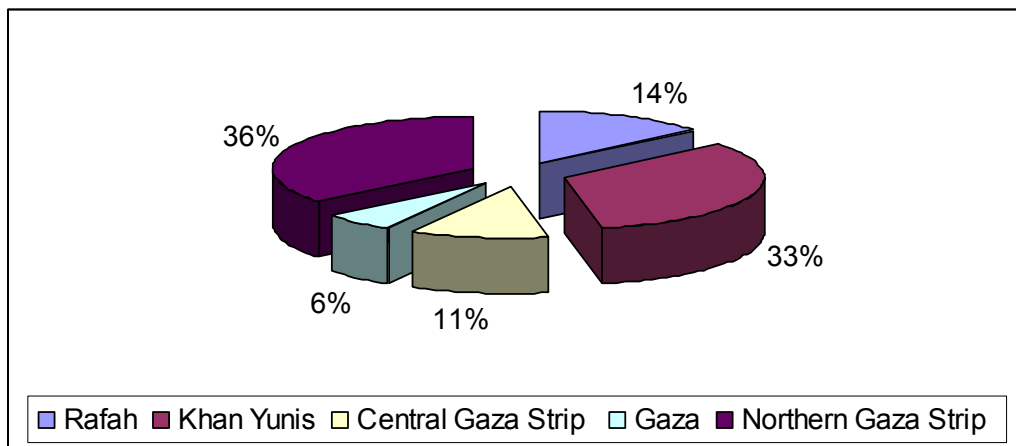
Area	2003									2004				Total
	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	
Rafah	57.5	50	122	214	10	27.5	350	3	3	15	47	21	8.5	928.5
Khan Yunis	261.5	500.2	385.5	31	2	84	349.6	57	22.5	144.5	0	68.5	234	2140.3
Central Gaza Strip	4	38	25	8	0	57	28.5	103	234	151	72	0	9	729.5
Gaza	0	318	1	0	0	12.5	0	3	0	0	43	31	0	408.8
Northern Gaza Strip	363.5	1160	445.5	0	215	4	20	0	0	0	0	0	9	2217
Total	686.5	2066.2	979	253	227	185	748.1	166	259.5	310.5	168	120.5	260.5	6424

* Figures are in dunums.

As shown in the above table, Israeli occupying forces razed 6424 donums of Palestinian agricultural land during the period under study, which constitute 28% of the total area of agricultural land razed by Israeli occupying forces since the beginning of the current Intifada (22892 donums). This marks an increasing escalation of land leveling by Israeli occupying forces. Besides, May 2003 witnessed the largest land leveling operations as Israeli occupying forces razed 2066.3 donums of agricultural land, and June 2003 comes next with a total of 979 donums of agricultural land having been razed. In May and June 2003, Israeli occupying forces launched a wide scale offensive on the northern Gaza Strip, during which they razed large areas of agricultural land and destroyed dozens of houses.

The largest land leveling operations during the period under study took place in the northern Gaza Strip (36%). Khan Yunis comes second with 33%, Rafah comes third with 14%, the central Gaza Strip comes fourth with 11% and Gaza comes last with 6%.

Diagram (1)
Distribution of Land Leveling in the Gaza Strip
1 April 2003 – 30 April 2004



Most actions of land leveling have taken place at border areas and the surroundings of Israeli settlements, such as the border areas between Palestinian Authority areas and Israel, the areas near “Kfar Darom” settlement in the central Gaza Strip and the areas near “Dogit,” “Elli Sinai” and “Nissanit” settlements in the northern Gaza Strip.

House Demolition

Israeli occupying forces have demolished hundreds of Palestinian houses, especially on agricultural land, in border areas and near Jewish settlements, which implies an Israeli policy that aims at creating large buffer zones. According to PCHR’s documentation, over the period under study, Israeli occupying forces totally demolished 803 Palestinian houses and damaged hundreds of others, rendering 6554 people (approximately 950 families) homeless.

In another attack on Palestinian civilian property, Israeli occupying forces destroyed 3 apartment buildings in al-Zahra area, south of Gaza City. According to investigations

conducted by PCHR, on Saturday evening, 25 October 2003, Israeli occupying forces fired approximately 15 tank shells at the three buildings and Israeli military vehicles then moved from “Netzarim” settlement, south of Gaza City, into al-Zahra town, taking control over the area. Israeli soldiers planted explosives inside a Palestinian police station and destroyed it. Soon after, Israeli soldiers ordered nearly 2000 residents of the area to vacate their houses and go to the nearby Nusseirat refugee camp. Once the evacuation of the area was complete, Israeli soldiers planted explosives inside the three buildings and destroyed them. The three buildings were owned by al-Zhafer Contracting Company and were in the final stages of construction. Each building was composed of 13 floors, each of which had 4 apartments; the total number of apartments that were destroyed is 156. A number of neighboring houses and buildings were also damaged in the explosion.

Table (2)
Palestinian Houses Totally Demolished in the Gaza Strip
1 April 2003 – 30 April 2004

Area	2003										2004			
	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	Total
Rafah	16	43	19	1	0	23	120	46	61	50	6	37	65	487
Khan Yunis	2	36	7	0	0	2	8	0	23	7	1	7	0	93
Central Gaza Strip	0	8	0	0	0	1	0	1	6	11	1	0	3	31
Gaza	4	4	0	0	0	12.5	156	0	0	0	1	4	0	169
Northern Gaza Strip	1	5	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	23
Total	23	96	42	1	0	26	293	47	90	68	9	48	69	803

Diagram (2)
Distribution of Houses Demolished in Various Areas of the Gaza Strip over Months

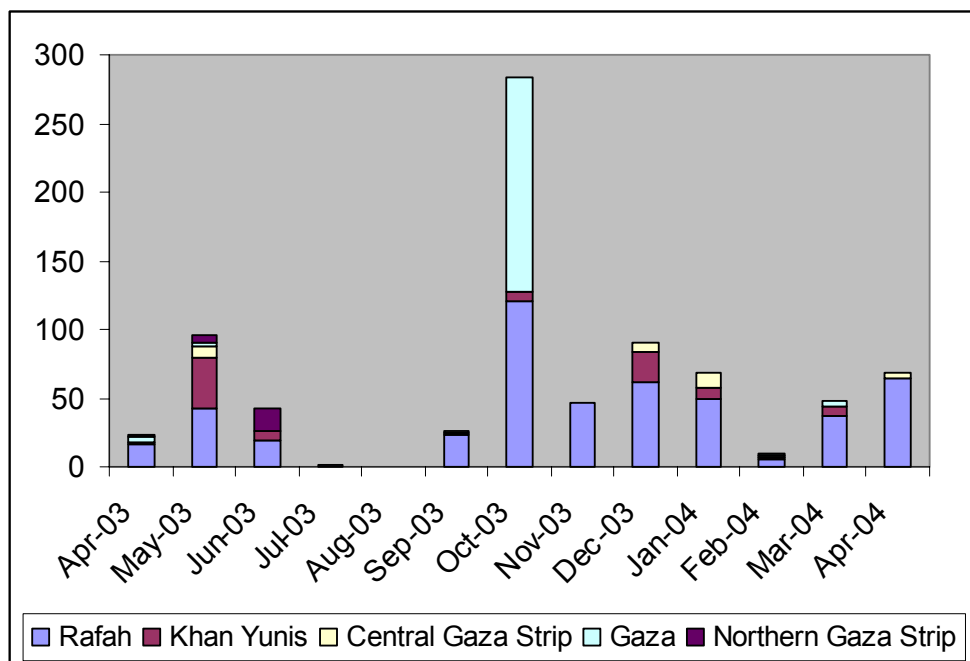


Table (3)
Distribution of People Affected by House Demolitions in the Gaza Strip

Area	Number of houses	Number of people
Rafah	487	5065
Khan Yunis	93	758
Central Gaza Strip	31	243
Gaza	169 ⁴	156
Northern Gaza Strip	23	332
Total	803	6554

In the majority of cases, Israeli occupying forces, reinforced with a number of military vehicles, tanks and bulldozers, encroach into Palestinian residential areas at night or early in the morning. They impose a curfew and then start demolishing houses. Palestinian civilians living in these areas are usually terrified by the Israeli military incursions.

Rafah has been the most affected area in the OPT by the Israeli policy of house demolition. From the beginning of al-Aqsa Intifada until 30 April 2004, Israeli occupying forces demolished 1059 Palestinian houses in Rafah, which constitute 56.7% of the total number of houses demolished by Israeli occupying forces in the Gaza Strip. As a result, approximately

⁴ This number includes 156 flats in 3 apartment buildings that were destroyed in al-Zahra town, south of Gaza City, by Israeli occupying forces in October 2003.

10270 (1075 families) have become homeless. Nearly 46% of these houses (487 houses) were demolished during the period under study. Israeli occupying forces have carried out most of house demolitions along the Egyptian border, in an apparent attempt to create a buffer zone that would disrupt the historical geographical contiguity between the Gaza Strip and Egypt and control the border, which means promoting their control over Rafah Terminal to hinder any possibility of handing the terminal to the Palestinian side in case of establishing a Palestinian state in the future. Through creating buffer zones, Israeli occupying forces seeks also to control the main roads and link “Gush Qatif” settlement bloc, which is established on Palestinian land, with Israeli territories.

Table (4)
Development of House Demolition in Rafah between 29 September 2000 and 30 April 2004

2000	2001				2002				2003				2004		
4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	April	Total
11	1	50	63	26	74	28	55	103	161	78	24	227	93	65	1059

The table shows an escalation in house demolition in Rafah, as over the period under study, Israeli occupying forces demolished 487 houses, which is higher than the number of houses that were demolished in 2001 and 2002 together. These house demolitions aim at forcing Palestinian civilians to leave their properties to create buffer zones. Most house demolitions were justified by Israeli occupying forces by searching for underground tunnels, but no tunnels were found and the houses were demolished.

Other Damages

Destruction of Palestinian land and houses has caused damages to other civilian property and facilities.

**Table (5): Damages Accompanying Land Leveling in the Gaza Strip
1 July 2002 – 31 March 2003**

Area	Rafah	Khan Yunis	Central Gaza Strip	Gaza	Northern Gaza Strip	Total
Irrigation networks	161	217	213	7	179	777
Wells	12	6	6	7	16	47
Agricultural pools	32	17	17	6	2	74
Water pumps	8	5	10	0	1	24
Greenhouses	187	53	8	0	21	269
Agricultural stores	11	40	63	6	10	130
Beehives	401	100	100	0	81	682
Bird farms	5	11	13	2	1	32
Animal farms	2	7	2	0	3	14
Insecticide sprinklers	6	4	6	1	2	19
Water tanks	3	2	5	0	0	10

Illegal Actions

Since 1967, the international community has considered Israel as a belligerent occupying power and the Palestinian Territories as occupied, meaning that the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949 (Fourth Geneva Convention) is applicable to these territories. However, Israeli occupying forces have systematically violated the Convention and international humanitarian law in dealing with Palestinian civilians in the OPT. The Fourth Geneva Convention and international humanitarian law provide protection for civilians in time of war, including civilians in occupied territories. They also provide that occupying powers are not free to use whatever force, measures or policies they wish in administering the occupied territories, rather they are obligated to protect the lives and property of civilians.

Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention provides that “*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 147 of the Convention considers “*extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly...*”⁵ as a grave breach of the Convention and thus constitute a war crime. These actions constitute collective punishment

⁵ Military necessities claimed by Israeli occupying forces to justify their attacks on Palestinian civilian property have no basis, as a military necessity requires the existence of an armed clash or confrontation, and the clash or confrontation is over a military necessity vanishes. In the majority of their military operations, Israeli occupying forces have attacked Palestinian civilian property in times of complete quietness and at night, while people were sleeping.

and reprisals against Palestinian civilians, in violation of article 33 of the Convention, which prescribes that: *"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 are prohibited. Pillage is prohibited. Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited."*

These unjustifiable actions also contradict the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Article 1 of the Covenant states that *"in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence,"* and Article 5 does not give any state, group or person any right *"to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights or freedoms recognized herein..."*

The UN Committee against Torture considered that the policies of closure and house demolition carried out by Israeli forces violate article 16 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and can never be justified.⁶

Covert Goals of Land Leveling and House Demolition

Israel has considered the situation in the OPT since 29 September 2000, when the current Palestinian Intifada started, an armed conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to justify its offensive on the Palestinian people. Israel believes that it is no longer obliged to act in accordance with law enforcement rules and is free to use military means, including lethal weapons, to oppress Palestinian protests, kill Palestinian civilians and destroy civilian property, since it is an armed conflict.

Israeli occupying forces often justify the wide scale destruction of Palestinian agricultural land and houses by claiming that Palestinians launch "terrorist attacks" on Israeli soldiers and settlers. They move into targeted areas, uproot trees, level land and demolish houses under the pretext of uncovering the area. Although Palestinian resistance activities in these areas have sharply decreased, Israeli occupying forces have continued to destroy Palestinian civilian property. These actions aim at increasing the suffering of Palestinian civilians, which in itself refutes the Israeli claims that these actions are military necessities. Land leveling and house demolitions often take place at night and owners of these properties are not informed in advance of this destruction, even though these properties do not pose any threat to the lives of Israeli soldiers and settlers.

In spite of the fragile security justification for the destruction of Palestinian land and houses claimed by Israeli occupying forces, it has become clear that those forces have hidden goals they seek to achieve, the most significant of which are:

⁶ The UN Committee against Torture was established in accordance with article 17 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Convention was adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 39/46 on 10th December 1984, and entered into force on 26th June 1987.

○ Settlement Expansion

Since the beginning of the current Palestinian Intifada, Israeli occupying forces have seized control over large areas of Palestinian agricultural land, particularly those adjacent to Israeli settlements. They have razed these areas, demolished houses built on them and then annexed them to Israeli settlements. For instance, they annexed areas of Palestinian agricultural land surrounding “Dogit,” “Elli Sinai” and “Nissanit” settlements in the northern Gaza Strip. On 22 February 2004, Israeli occupying forces handed written orders to a number of Palestinian families living near “Netzarim” settlement, south of Gaza city, informing them that their land would be seized for “military purposes” until the end of December 2005. Such orders mean that the land would be effectively confiscated. The orders provided seven days for appeal. PCHR submitted an appeal on behalf of the owners of these lands to the Israeli military legal advisor. According to the orders which were issued by the Head of the Israeli Military Southern Command, Dan Harel, “the seizure of land is carried out in light of the current security situation and for absolute military needs (security wall – Netzarim, Gaza) to establish security facilities.” The area of land subject to these orders is estimated at 27 dunums. However, the construction of a “security wall” around the “Netzarim” settlement is likely to involve seizure of additional Palestinian land and/or denial of access to other areas of Palestinian land in this locale. The maps annexed to the military orders showed that the wall would encircle the southern part of “Netzarim” settlement which would expand an existing buffer zone around the settlement. The construction of the wall is expected to isolate hundreds of dunums of Palestinian land, which will be trapped between the settlement and the new security wall. The Israeli High Court will consider an appeal submitted by PCHR against these orders on 9 June 2004.

These Israeli measures come together with Israeli claims that Israeli occupying forces would withdraw from the Gaza Strip and dismantle settlement, and thus raise questions regarding the Israeli real intentions as Israeli occupying forces have continued to achieve their settlement goals.

There has been a clear increase in the use of land seizure orders in the Gaza Strip in 2004. On 19 January 2004, Israeli occupying forces issued written orders to 10 Palestinian families in Deir al-Balah ordering the confiscation of land located northeast of “Kfar Darom” settlement, with a total area of approximately 700 dunums. On 6 February 2004, Israeli occupying forces handed land seizure orders to 7 Palestinian families who own agricultural land to the west of “Kfar Darom” settlement, southeast of Deir al-Balah, informing them that their land would be confiscated for security and military purposes. The area of this land is estimated at 200 dunums. PCHR appealed the military orders in both these instances. In the first case, PCHR’s first appeal to the Israeli military legal advisor was rejected. PCHR subsequently submitted an appeal to the Israeli High Court. The court refused to issue a temporary injunction to halt the seizure orders. It will consider PCHR’s appeal on 23 May 2004. With regard to the second case, PCHR submitted an appeal on behalf of the seven families to the Israeli military legal advisor, who rejected the appeal. PCHR subsequently submitted an appeal to the Israeli High Court, which refused to issue a temporary injunction to stop the seizure. The court will consider the appeal on 9 June 2004.

Since 1967, Israeli occupying forces have confiscated Palestinian lands to establish settlements and transfer Israelis to live there, by offering them financial privileges to encourage them to live in settlements. The Israeli settlement policy flagrantly violates the

Fourth Geneva Convention. Since the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993, Israel has largely expanded settlements in the OPT through annexing more Palestinian lands.

○ **Creating Buffer Zones and Establishing Bypass Roads**

Israeli occupying forces have isolated Palestinian communities in the Gaza Strip from one another through erecting military checkpoints on the main and branch roads. They have also confiscated more Palestinian land to establish bypass roads. For instance, in a step aimed at the annexation of more Palestinian land to Israeli settlements, which are illegally established on Palestinian lands, on Sunday, 20 July 2003, Israeli occupying forces completed an operation to surround a settler road they had already established on Palestinian land north and west of "Morag" settlement, southeast of Khan Yunis, with barbwire. An area of 283 donums of Palestinian land was thus effectively annexed to the settlement. Israeli occupying forces began the construction of the settler road on 29 June 2003. The road begins in the vicinity of Israeli military locations on Palestinian lands in Gizan al-Najjar area, south of Khan Yunis, that had previously been razed by Israeli forces. It then surrounds the settlement from the north and west. The distance between the road and the settlement ranges between 5 to 200 meters. The road is 1800 meters long and 10 meters wide. Israeli occupying forces linked the road with another settler road established by Israeli forces to the west of the settlement. This road, established in January 2003, was constructed on a 74-donum area of Palestinian land confiscated from Darwish al-Masri and Mohammed al-Saqqa.

On 13 January 2003, Israeli occupying forces established a new road between Salah al Din Street opposite to the Erez industrial zone in the northern Gaza Strip and Sultan 'Abdul Hamid Street in Beit Hanoun. The road is 500 meters long and 15 meters wide. It was established on Palestinian land that had been already razed by Israeli occupying forces.

On 10 April 2001, Israeli occupying forces confiscated approximately 240 donums of Palestinian agricultural land in al-Sumairi area in al-Qarara village, north of Khan Yunis, to construct a bridge linking the "Gush Qatif" settlement bloc in the west with Israeli territories in the east. Israeli occupying forces had already erected 2 military checkpoints on these areas of land.

○ **Construction of a Separating Wall**

Security necessities claimed by Israeli occupying forces to justify their attacks on Palestinian civilian property have no basis, rather, these attacks constitute a form of collective punishment against the Palestinian civilian population. They aim at confiscating Palestinian land and creating buffer zones along the border of the Gaza Strip and near settlements and bypass roads. According to PCHR's documentation, Israeli occupying forces have razed large areas of Palestinian agricultural land and demolished hundreds of houses along the Egyptian border, south of Rafah, to create a buffer zone 10 kilometers long and 200 meters wide, which means control over 2000 donums of Palestinian land. They have also established a separating wall along the border. Israeli occupying forces have also razed large areas of Palestinian agricultural land east of al-Maghazi and refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip and Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip, and established separating walls.

Impacts of Land Leveling and House Demolition on Palestinian Civilians

The destruction of hundreds or even thousands of Palestinian civilian facilities, including houses, factories, workshops, arable land and farms has caused large financial losses, which have affected the economic, social, civil and political rights of Palestinians. The large impact of such destruction refutes all Israeli claims regarding house demolition and land leveling.⁷ The impact of land leveling and house demolition can be summed up as follows:

1. Approximately 14.6% of the total area of agricultural land in the Gaza Strip (approximately 156720 donums) has been leveled, which is considered a high percentage given the fact that the Palestinian economy is very weak.
2. The policy of house demolition has rendered 16497 Palestinian civilians (2371 families) homeless. Some relief agencies have provided these families with tents and the Palestinian Authority has provided temporary houses for some families.
3. People whose houses have been demolished have lost their property and furniture, as Israeli forces have not given them enough time to leave their houses before demolishing them.
4. Land leveling and demolition of houses and civilian facilities have created wide spaces along the border with Israel, on both sides of bypass roads and near Israeli settlements and military locations, dozens and even hundreds of meters wide. The Israeli practices indicate that Israeli occupying forces aim at the expulsion of Palestinians from these areas in order to annex the areas and create new illegal Jewish settlements or expand the existing settlements, which remain just as illegal.
5. The policy of land leveling and house demolition undermines economic and social development as it contributes to increasing poverty and unemployment and makes thousands of Palestinian civilians homeless.

⁷ Israel always justifies land leveling and house demolition by claiming that members of the Palestinian resistance launch attacks on Israeli soldiers and settlers from these areas. Israeli occupying forces regularly encroach into targeted areas and raze land or demolish houses under the pretext of cleaning the area to be seeable, leaving civilians with no choice but to leave the area and abandon their property. Sometimes, such destruction takes place in areas which area completely quiet.

Conclusion

Israeli occupying forces have adopted a systematic policy of demolishing Palestinian houses and razing agricultural land to create new facts on the ground imposed on the Palestinian civilian population who are protected under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Israeli occupying forces have razed areas of agricultural land and destroyed many houses and economic facilities. The use of heavy military vehicles and the deployment of hundreds of soldiers by Israeli occupying forces to carry out such destruction give the impression that Israeli occupying forces are waging a compressive war on the Palestinian property.

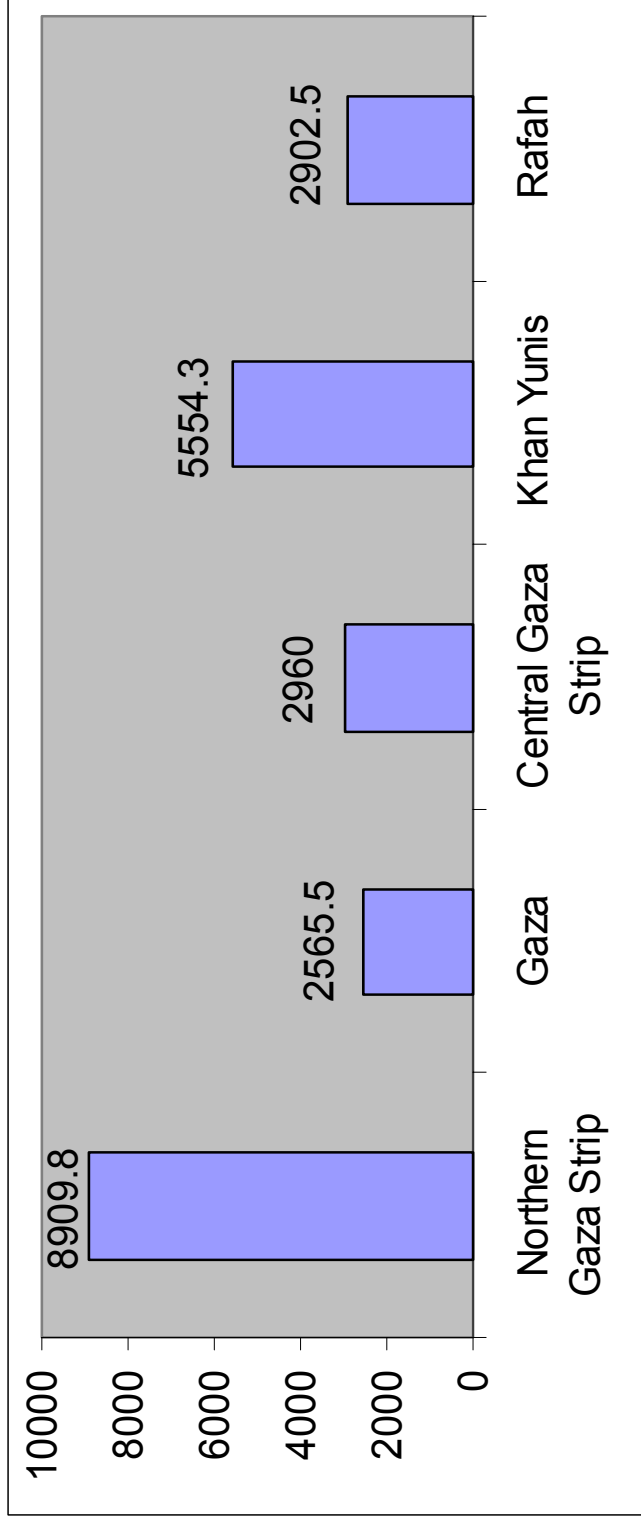
Since the beginning of al-Aqsa Intifada, Israeli occupying forces have razed 22892.1 donums of land, mostly agricultural land, in the Gaza Strip. They have also destroyed much agricultural equipment. Such actions are not expected to stop in the near future, which means creating new facts on the ground by Israeli occupying forces that have continued to reinforce their presence and establish military posts throughout the Gaza Strip.

PCHR reiterates its call upon the international community, especially the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, to take practical measures to enforce Israel's respect for the Convention. PCHR also calls upon the international community to immediately provide protection for the Palestinian civilian population in the OPT.

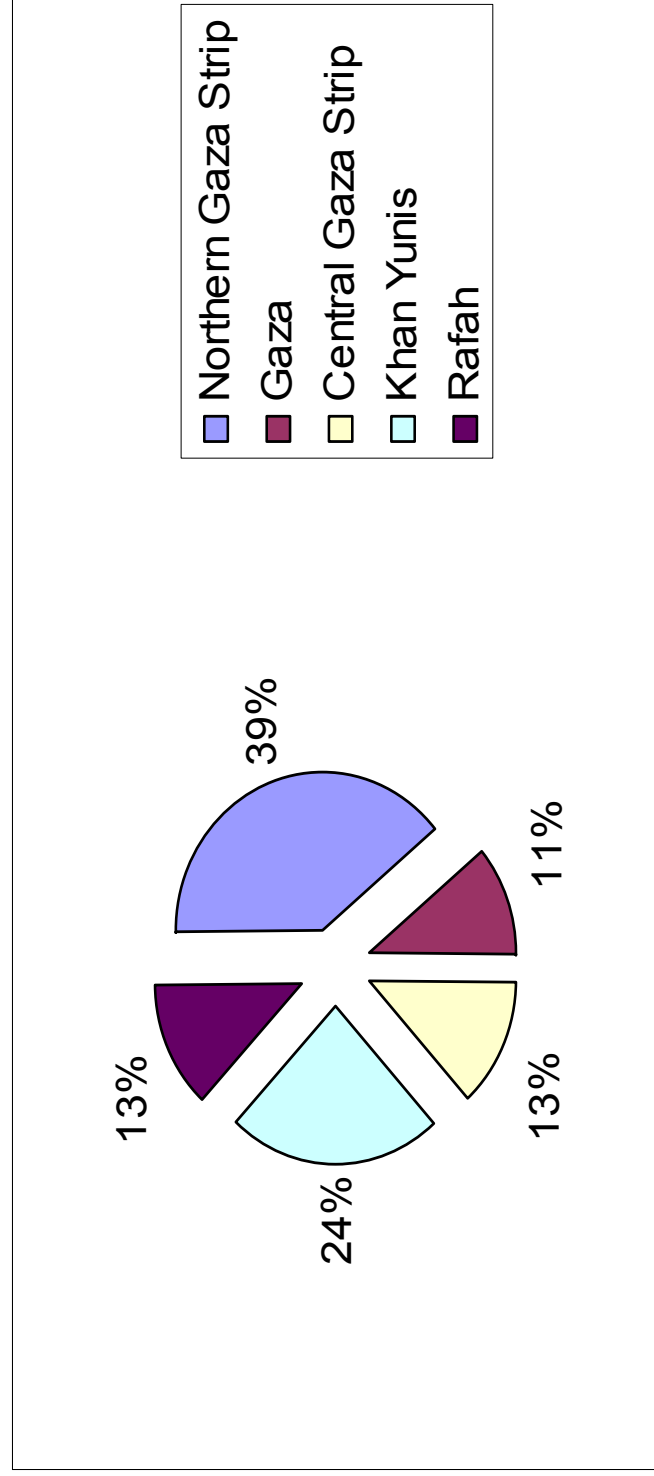
Annex (1)
Table of Development of Land Leveling from the Beginning of the Current Intifada until 30 April 2004

Area	2000				2001				2002				2003				2004				Total			
	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter		4 th quarter		
Rafah	706	231	839	4	17.5	0	0	16	74	86.5	229.5	251.5	356	83				83					8.5	2902.5
Khan Yunis	798.5	373	1255	26	175.5	259	37	184.5	131	174.5	1147.3	117	429.1	213				213					234	5554.3
Central Gaza Strip	980.5	362	103	24	17.5	42	0	221	251.5	229	67	65	365.5	223				223					9	2960
Gaza	918	450	196	16	78	171.2	59.5	119.5	104	44.5	319	12.5	3	74				74					0	2565.5
Northern Gaza Strip	402	1573.5	715	36	1578.7	235	653	154.5	367.2	977.9	1969	219	20	0				0					9	8909.8
Total	3805	2989.5	3108	106	1867.2	707.2	749.5	695.5	927.7	1512.4	3731.8	665	1173.6	593				593					260.5	22892.1

Annex (2)
Land Leveling in the Gaza Strip from the Beginning of the Current Intifada Until 30 April 2004



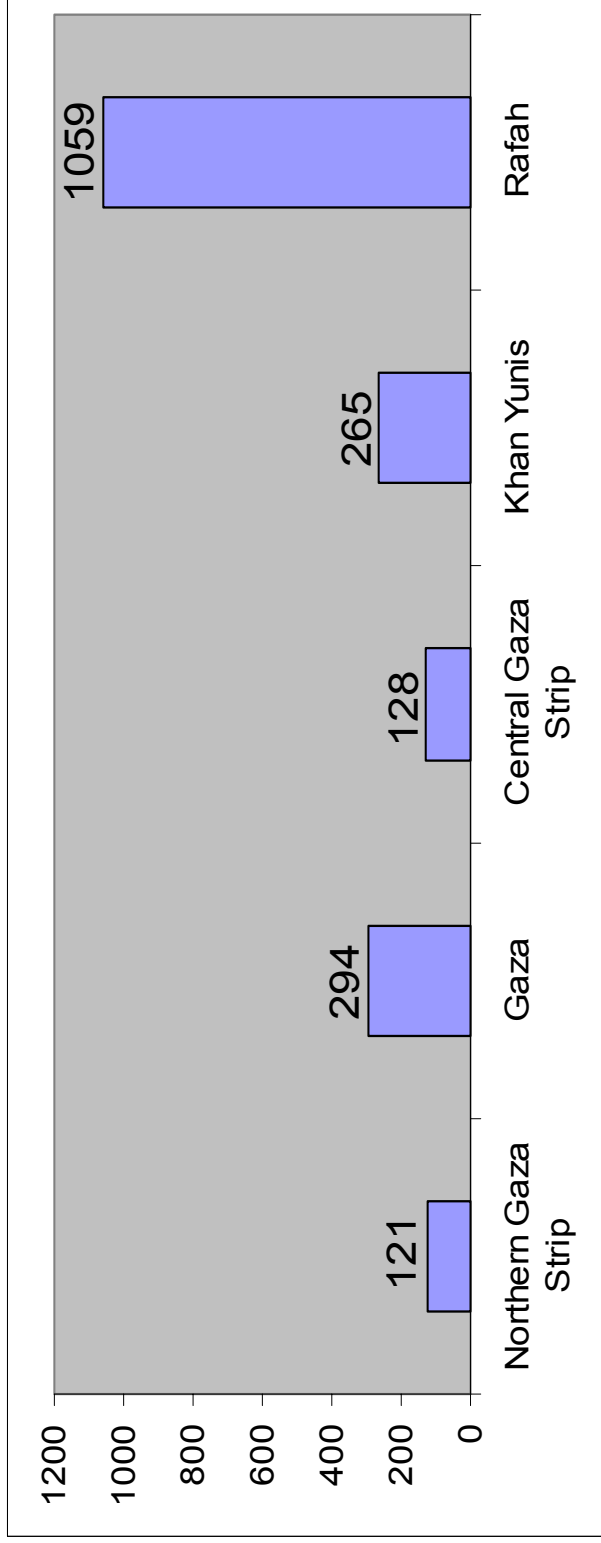
Annex (3)
Land Leveling in the Gaza Strip from the Beginning of the Current Intifada Until 30 April 2004



Annex (4)
Table of Development of House Demolitions from the Beginning of the Current Intifada until 30 April 2004

Area	2000				2001				2002				2003				2004				Total		
	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter		4 th quarter	
Rafah	11	1	50	63	26	74	28	55	103	161	78	24	227	93	65	1059							
Khan Yunis	36	2	28	1	51	5	1	13	5	30	45	2	31	15	0	265							
Central Gaza Strip	21	8	6	0	4	18	3	2	20	15	8	1	7	12	3	128							
Gaza	44	18	5	0	2	23	3	6	12	12	8	0	156	5	0	294							
Northern Gaza Strip	1	14	9	2	1	10	1	11	13	36	22	0	0	0	1	121							
Total	113	43	98	66	84	130	36	87	153	254	161	27	430	125	69	1867							

Annex (5)
House Demolitions in the Gaza Strip from the Beginning of the Current Intifada until 30 April 2004



Annex (6)
House Demolitions in the Gaza Strip from the Beginning of the Current Intifada until 30 April 2004

