

April 29, 2021

Dear Secretary Blinken,

As representatives of U.S. churches and faith-based organizations with a presence in or connections to Israel and Palestine, we write to request your immediate action to halt the imminent displacement of up to 2,000 Palestinians in Jerusalem.

In the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, 169 Palestinians - including 46 children – may be removed from their homes as soon as May 2, 2021 if current eviction orders are enforced. An additional 100 homes in the Al-Bustan neighborhood of Jerusalem are also slated for demolition in the near future. If these homes are demolished a further 1,500 Palestinians -63% of them children – will be forcibly displaced.

More broadly, action is needed to ensure that all Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes, schools, and other property is ceased. In March 2021 alone, at least 58 Palestinian structures were destroyed by Israel. And according to the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, as many as 20,000 Palestinian structures in Jerusalem are at risk of demolition.

Demolitions of Palestinian property and the forced displacement of Palestinians must end.

While the Israeli government often cites a lack of permits when demolishing Palestinian property, it systematically refuses to approve permits for building in Palestinian areas. In Jerusalem, only 7 percent of approved building permits are for construction in Palestinian communities¹, and in Area C of the West Bank over 98 percent of permit requests are rejected.² This leaves Palestinians with no option but to build without permits.

In the case of the threatened displacements in Sheikh Jarrah, the Israeli courts have ruled that Palestinian families—who have been present in Sheikh Jarrah since the 1950s when they were resettled in the area as refugees—must leave because settler groups claim that the land they live on was owned by Jews prior to 1948. The courts have given settler groups with no long-term connection to the land rights to the property, even while Palestinians displaced in 1948 are refused access to their homes and properties despite proof of ownership.

If carried out, these demolitions and forced displacement actions will cause untold suffering for Palestinians and undermine the prospects of a just and lasting peace for all.

Recently Rep. Betty McCollum introduced H.R. 2590 which, if passed, would ensure that no US assistance to Israel is used to fund the demolition of Palestinian homes, to annex Palestinian land, or to hold Palestinian children in military detention. This bill is important, and you have the power to put in place these restrictions on U.S. assistance without congressional action.

¹ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-only-7-of-jlem-building-permits-go-to-palestinian-neighborhoods-1.5432437>

² <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-rejects-98-of-palestinian-building-permit-requests-in-west-bank-s-area-c-1.8403807>

On April 1, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said, “We believe when it comes to settlement activity that Israel should refrain from unilateral steps that exacerbate tensions and that undercut efforts to advance a negotiated two-state solution.” Evictions and demolitions of Palestinian homes by the Government of Israel do precisely this.

We therefore ask that you do everything in your power to oppose these forced displacement actions and that you take steps to ensure that no U.S. funding to Israel is used to support these or other abuses of Palestinians’ human rights and international law.

American Friends Service Committee
Christian Reformed Church in North America
Churches for Middle East Peace
Church World Service
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Lott Carey Convention
National Council of Churches USA
Pax Christi USA
The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries