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POSITION PAPER

# THE CONSEQUENCES OF SETTLER VIOLENCE AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

ON THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF PALESTINIAN  
COMMUNITIES IN AREA C

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## Introduction

Over the course of five decades since its occupation of the West Bank, Israel has methodically and increasingly seized control of lands in Area C. Israel's strategy includes the establishment of settlements, unofficial outposts, and settler shepherding farms, all in stark violation of international law. The construction of these outposts and farms has accelerated in recent years, starting as small agricultural enterprises and expanding into established settlements. These efforts are the direct extension of Israel's territorial expansion policy in the West Bank.

The surge in settler outposts and farms has intensified the challenges faced by Palestinian shepherding communities throughout the West Bank. As Israel refuses to grant official recognition to these communities, they remain isolated and disconnected from basic infrastructure, including water and electricity. As such, they are particularly vulnerable to the ever-increasing presence of surrounding settlers. These communities endure daily oppression and coercion, living in a state of constant fear, insecurity, distress, and systemic discrimination. They continue to be plundered of their agricultural lands, which constitute their primary source of livelihood, while also being denied access to natural resources and enduring physical and mental abuse from settlers and the Israeli military.

To outline the everyday reality of these communities, this position paper adopts a broader understanding of the term "coercion," as defined by the 1998 Rome Statute.<sup>1</sup> According to this definition, coercion includes a variety of measures in addition to the use of physical force, such as threats, psychological oppression, and abuse of power. By adopting this perspective, the paper thoroughly examines the present conditions in Area C of the West Bank, shedding light on the mechanisms of oppression and coercion these communities must navigate daily. It serves as a testament to the pervasive violence that defines their existence and the consequent erosion of community resilience.

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<sup>1</sup> International Criminal Court (1998). Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (A/CONF.183/9). Article 7(i)(d). Retrieved from [<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>]

This position paper is part of a broader project in collaboration with Yesh Din- Volunteers for Human Rights, which began in 2023. The project's overarching goal is to enhance public comprehension of the detrimental effects of the occupation, extending from individual experiences to the broader oppressive environment, and to explore its impact on entire communities and societies. The preparation of this position paper was disrupted by the outbreak of war in October 2023 and the heightened violence in the West Bank, thus restricting its scope. Therefore, the research is grounded in a dataset that includes a limited number of interviews, along with informal conversations and testimonies.

This position paper focuses on the influence of settler outposts and the coercive environment on the right to health and community resilience. It recognizes that the ongoing expansion of settlements sustains the collective trauma endured by Palestinians as a consequence of Israel's expropriation and expulsion of homes, lands, and communities. By doing this, the position paper broadens the perspective through which the impacts of the Israeli occupation on Palestine are comprehended. For years, PHRI's efforts have concentrated on expanding access to medical care and documenting the abuses faced by Palestinians as individuals - which include torture, violence, and limited access to healthcare services.<sup>2</sup> More recently, the "A Life Exposed" project expanded the perspective to the family unit level, examining the adverse effects of home invasions and private sphere violations.<sup>3</sup> Now, we explore the community level and how routine changes, limitations, barriers, movement restrictions, uncertain futures, and violence fundamentally destabilize community resilience.

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<sup>2</sup> Mor Efrat (2015). "Divide and Conquer". PHRI. <https://www.phr.org.il/en/divide-conquer-new-phri-report/>

<sup>3</sup> Miryam Wijler (2020). "A LIFE EXPOSED: Military invasions of Palestinian homes in the West Bank." Yesh Din. [https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/Exposed\\_Life\\_2020/Exposed\\_Life\\_ENG.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/Exposed_Life_2020/Exposed_Life_ENG.pdf)

## The everyday lives of shepherding communities in Area C: combined institutional & settler violence

The Palestinian Bedouin shepherding communities in Area C of the West Bank are routinely exposed to settler violence, which serves as a mechanism promoting forced displacement. The various intimidation tactics employed by Israeli settlers deprive these communities of the capacity to predict and plan their futures. Simultaneously, they cause severe financial hardships by blocking access to crucial resources and infrastructure, including water, nutrition, and electricity. Palestinians are denied construction rights on roughly 70 percent of Area C lands, and the remaining 30 percent are subject to Israeli planning processes, through which Palestinian construction permits are rarely granted.<sup>4</sup> Between 2016 and 2020, merely 24 out of the 2,550 Palestinian construction permit requests in Area C, less than one percent, were approved. In addition, the Israeli Civil Administration approved only seven of the submitted 123 Palestinian local development plans.<sup>5</sup> These policies result in widespread unapproved construction, which Israel later demolishes. Given the anticipation of imminent demolitions, Palestinians are reluctant to invest in structures that meet the necessary standards. Meanwhile, Israeli settlements not only persist in their expansion but also receive support from Israeli authorities.

Since 2009, Israel has demolished over 7,200 constructions in Area C - predominantly Palestinian homes and agricultural structures.<sup>6</sup> These demolitions have resulted in the displacement of over 9,300 Palestinians. In contrast, Israeli settlements received 8,356 housing construction permits between 2016 and 2020, with some settlements growing by nearly 35 percent.<sup>7</sup> The Israeli government has incentivized this expansion, resulting in over half a million Israelis residing in 140

<sup>4</sup> Noga Kadman (2013). "Acting the Landlord: Israel's Policy in Area C, the West Bank". B'Tselem. [https://www.btselem.org/download/201306\\_area\\_c\\_report\\_eng.pdf](https://www.btselem.org/download/201306_area_c_report_eng.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council (2023). Area C is everything. Retrieved from <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/area-c-is-everything/area-c-is-everything-v2.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (n.d.). Community - Driven outline plans in Area C. United Nations. <https://www.ochaopt.org/page/community-driven-outline-plans-area-c>

<sup>7</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council (2023). Area C is everything. Retrieved from <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/area-c-is-everything/area-c-is-everything-v2.pdf>

settlements and 144 outposts in Area C, marking a 17 percent growth in the last five years.<sup>8</sup>

The establishment of settler outposts and shepherding farms has significantly accelerated in recent years. The stated objective of this strategy, which has gained momentum since 2017, is to swiftly gain control over extensive lands by establishing sheep farms – which require far fewer resources than developing larger populated settlements.<sup>9</sup> The lands taken over by settlers usually include grazing areas, water resources, and cultivated lands that have sustained the Palestinian communities residing there for generations. Typically, settlers will forcibly enter grazing lands while threatening, provoking, and attacking shepherds and their herds. After driving out the Palestinian shepherds and their livestock, the settlers use the land for grazing their own sheep and cattle.

Israel's formal policy of restricting Palestinians' access to their lands and curtailing their planning and development rights is thus paired with informal and unchecked settler aggression, sometimes with direct military support. This partnership creates a systemic mechanism for displacing Palestinians from Area C. As a result, numerous communities have been left with no choice but to abandon their homes and flee for their lives. **Six such communities were displaced between 2021 and 2023, and since the October 7 events and the intensification of settler violence, 16 more communities have been forced out.** Within just two months, over 1,000 people were forcibly driven out of their homes under threats of violence – including by those meant to protect them.

These are not instances of voluntary relocation but rather cases of forced displacement. These coercive actions undermine the resilience and cohesion of entire communities while eroding social networks and hindering access to essential services and sources of income.

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<sup>8</sup> Peace Now website: <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population>

<sup>9</sup> Yonatan Kanonich (2021). "Plundered Pastures Israeli settler shepherding outposts in the West Bank and their infringement on Palestinians' human rights." Yesh Din. <https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/shepherding+outposts+2021/shepherding+outposts+ENG.pdf>

The experience of displacement is traumatic, and its negative impacts are profound. This is especially true for communities in which most members have already experienced displacement, expulsion, and becoming refugees several times before. The forced displacement of Palestinian shepherding communities represents just one facet of a broader, ongoing collective trauma endured by the Palestinian people. This includes the erasure of entire traditions and the imposition of new ways of life, which are difficult, if not impossible, to adapt to.

## Interviews with members of Palestinian shepherding communities

The testimonies presented in this position paper are drawn from interviews conducted with Abu Ahmed, Abu Najah, and Abu Amjad (aliases) in August and September 2023. These three men and their families were forcibly displaced from Ein Samiya, located northeast of Jerusalem, in May 2023. After years of struggling to fight Israeli policies and the oppressive violence of settler militias, the families fled their homes without knowing where they were heading. The area of Ein Samiya, once home to 270 residents, has now been completely emptied of Palestinians after years of restrictions on infrastructure and construction rights, frequent demolitions, livestock theft, blocked roads, and denial of essential resources such as water.

The conversations with these men illustrated the violent reality confronted by Palestinian shepherding communities in Area C and the mechanisms of oppression and coercion utilized against them. The narratives of displacement and violence emerging from their stories are a poignant reminder of the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories overall, and specifically in Area C.

**Abu Ahmed** was driven out of Ein Samiya in the past year, witnessing firsthand the changes forced on his community and the resulting challenges. His testimony highlights the ongoing struggle of these communities to secure essential resources and the constant pressure of life under the threat of displacement. Abu Ahmed's community has

gradually lost their grazing lands and sources of water, both crucial to their survival. The establishment of Israeli shepherding outposts not only limited access to these resources but also exposed the Palestinian community to settler violence, disrupting their social life and traditions that were based on a delicate balance between preserving natural resources and meeting human needs.

A resident of Ein Samiya for 44 years until his forced displacement in May 2023, **Abu Najah**'s experiences demonstrate the mental and emotional toll of settler violence. His stories about harassment, threats of physical violence, and property destruction clearly convey the everyday reality for Palestinians living in Area C. His narrative doesn't merely revolve around suffering and loss; it is also a tale of resilience, defiance, and a commitment to enduring hardships while upholding community bonds. In his interview, Abu Najah described the attacks on his village, the destruction of homes, and the theft of livestock. These tactics are utilized by settlers, with military backing, to terrorize and forcibly drive out Palestinian families. Abu Najah shares harrowing details of the physical and psychological war being waged against his community.

For **Abu Amjad**, the challenges of navigating life amid uncertainty and threats are a central theme in his life. In his interview, he recounts his forced displacement and ongoing effort to uphold a semblance of normalcy, illustrating the resilience needed to restart construction efforts repeatedly. His story reveals the profound ways the Israeli occupation impacts Palestinians as individuals. His displacement experiences and his struggle to maintain land rights demonstrate the broader political and social struggles fought by Palestinians in Area C. His testimony exemplifies the complex reality of navigating between state policies, territorial claims, and human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Collectively, the three interviews and the narratives they convey depict a community under siege. The Israeli shepherding outposts and settler violence carry severe consequences for the health and welfare of Palestinians in Area C. The tangible impacts include the loss of homes and sources of income, while the equally profound psychological



repercussions involve traumas due to displacement, the pressure of life under constant threat, and the pain caused by the erasure of entire communities, cultures, and traditions. These interviews serve not only as accounts of individual suffering but also as reflections of the shared experience of Palestinian life amid settler violence and land expansion. By hearing from residents of Ein Samiya, we demonstrate how the settler outposts and everyday violence shape the determinants of Palestinian health in Area C.

## Determinants of health

### 1. Violence

The rising violence and intimidation carried out by Israeli settlers and the Israeli military have profoundly affected the health and well-being of the Palestinian shepherding communities in Area C. The interviews conducted with residents show the direct and everyday challenges and threats they face. This violence manifests in various forms, including movement restrictions and stone attacks on vehicles, homes, and shepherds. They also include the invasion of homes, villages, and agricultural lands, the deliberate burning of fields and olive groves, the uprooting of trees, and, occasionally, the deployment of Molotov cocktails and firearms. The regular assaults they endure disrupt their routines and foster an atmosphere of fear and insecurity.

These tactics of terror are employed both day and night. As one interviewee noted, **the settlers "began to arrive at night, one riding a mule and one riding a horse. They would go through the homes at midnight, one a.m., two a.m., you see? Sometimes, they would attack the homes and flee when we woke up."** This constant fear, especially at night, not only disrupts sleep patterns and induces stress but also forces residents into a perineal state of alertness.

Such fears are often realized, as the interviewee continued to explain: **"They came to set us on fire, you see? Once, they threw a Molotov cocktail. Luckily, some residents were awake and put out the fire**



**before anything happened. You can never know when these settlers will show up.**" He added the residences of the community were only accessible by vehicle and that the central road leading to the village was unsafe. Settlers position themselves along the road to restrict movement and launch attacks on residents.

All interviewed community members consistently pointed out the collaboration between the military and settlers, emphasizing how the presence of Israeli soldiers supports settlers in executing attacks. According to one of the interviewed residents, settlers **"bring an army with them, and some of the soldiers are settlers themselves. Whenever there is a conflict, and the military arrives, I see them; they are settlers dressed in military uniforms."** The collaboration between settlers and soldiers, coupled with the absence of protection for residents, exacerbates the feeling of insecurity among the Palestinian communities. According to another interviewee, the settlers operate with impunity and receive support from Israeli authorities and military forces: **"Residents are no longer safe. One night, they came by and stole two vehicles from Kafr Malik. They arrived dressed in military uniforms, took the vehicles, and left... The settlers have the final say; they call the shots and behave as they please."**

According to Yesh Din, Israeli security forces rarely confront settlers regarding their violent actions against Palestinians. Between 2005 and 2023, 93.7% of investigations into Israeli attacks on Palestinians and their property in the West Bank ended without charges.<sup>10</sup>

The tactics employed by settlers to terrorize and menace Palestinian residents are exceptionally brutal. In Wadi a-Siq, an area from which all Palestinians were expelled after October 7, residents recounted the provocative and violent actions carried out by settlers, such as recklessly driving at night while honking, cursing, and laughing. As one interviewee described: **"They arrive at midnight, driving on the roads, between the houses. They honk, laugh, and play the radio loudly.**

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<sup>10</sup> Yesh Din (2024). "Data Sheet, December 2023: Law Enforcement on Israeli Civilians in the West Bank (Settler violence) 2005-2023". <https://www.yesh-din.org/en/data-sheet-december-2023-law-enforcement-on-israeli-civilians-in-the-west-bank-settler-violence-2005-2023/>

**Why? To provoke us. To force a Palestinian to react and call the police, after which the Palestinian will spend three to four months in prison, pay 5,000-6,000 NIS, and then abandon the area. That is what they want; they provoke and agitate Palestinians to get them to leave.**" He argued that the settlers want everyone expelled, **"both people and livestock, from the lands they have taken over in Area C."** The settler harassment often escalates into full-scale terror attacks, including Molotov cocktails being hurled at homes, the deliberate burning of olive groves, and live fire directed at unarmed residents.

According to another concerning testimony, settlers escorted by military forces entered a Palestinian residence and violently attacked a mother and her children: **"Last year, settlers entered a woman's home while she was inside... They entered with the military, beat the woman, and broke her arm. They may have permanently injured her."** Apart from the direct physical harm, these incidents also inflict enduring emotional and psychological trauma, along with adverse public health and environmental effects. This is apparent in the account of one interviewee, who detailed how settlers discard sheep carcasses by leaving them near the homes of neighboring Palestinians: **"A settler threw a dead sheep near the school and covered it in poison. They also pumped the water out of the school's tanks and stole the food for the livestock."**

The increasing frequency of settler violence and the cooperation of Israeli security forces - whether by overlooking and protecting the assailants or by actively engaging in the attacks - contributes to the residents' sense of helplessness.

## **2. Lost lands and livelihoods**

The Israeli outposts and settlements often lead to the loss of lands and resources crucial to shepherding and agriculture, upon which these communities depend. This loss of their primary source of income disrupts traditional lifestyles and cultural practices deeply connected to the land. Shepherding communities in Area C face poverty and limited economic prospects. The barriers imposed by the Israeli military,

including movement restrictions, exacerbate economic hardships by creating a severe shortage of the financial resources needed to sustain health services and secure essentials such as food and clean water.

The severe construction restrictions and the looming threat of settlers taking over lands have resulted in extreme housing insecurity for Palestinian shepherding communities. Most Palestinian houses in Area C are poorly constructed and built on small plots of land. This has led to crowding construction and a lack of access to necessities. Difficulties obtaining construction permits and lack of infrastructure access, including adequate water, sanitation, and electricity, force families to endure harsh living conditions, intensifying public health and hygiene concerns. Moreover, the constant threat of demolition perpetuates ongoing mental stress. These conditions contribute to economic difficulties, produce social instability, and undermine the well-being and cohesion of local communities.

### **3. Water**

Seventy percent of Palestinians in Area C lack regular access to water. This situation is particularly dire for shepherding communities, left isolated from water networks and forbidden from constructing wells or developing independent water infrastructure. As a result, they are forced to buy water at a price six times higher than piped water, placing a substantial burden on the already impoverished communities. This water shortage is further exasperated by settlers seizing natural resources and wells. At times, water container shipments are delayed by settlers and the military. The critically low water consumption severely impacts the health and living standards of the shepherding communities.

### **4. Access to healthcare services**

Healthcare access in Area C is severely restricted. Military roadblocks considerably prolong the travel time to medical clinics, posing challenges for seeking emergency and routine healthcare. With a lack

of permanently operational Palestinian clinics in the area, residents must navigate winding roads to distant clinics or rely on mobile health services provided by NGOs, the United Nations, and the Palestinian Authority. Inconsistent healthcare access adversely impacts the provision of medical care, follow-up treatments, public health work, and disease prevention.

Furthermore, healthcare facilities in Area C are often underdeveloped and are similarly restricted by Israeli construction permits. Lastly, the availability and quality of local health services are directly impacted by the limited presence of health professionals, medicines, and medical equipment.

## Consequences

### 1. Mental health consequences

The violent circumstances experienced by Palestinians profoundly affect the psycho-social well-being and mental health of local communities. From the moment an illegal outpost encroaches on a community, a house is broken into, or a family member is injured or loses their livelihood, the community begins to lose its sense of security. Stress, anxiety, and exposure to violence have become commonplace for these communities. This constant state of fear and insecurity gives rise to numerous challenges and consequences, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD. In conversations, residents mentioned that engaging in most regular activities, like walking to school, traveling to the hospital, or going to work, is nearly impossible in their oppressive environment. They emphasized that children cannot play alone without supervision or attend school unaccompanied.

The persistent feeling of insecurity and fear, coupled with encounters of injustice and systemic discrimination, frequently materialize as physical pain and an inability to think, eat, or find joy. When questioned about the mental health impact of the proximity to settlers and exposure to violence, one of the interviewees remarked: **"When you lose your sense of safety, I swear, you become constantly worried, you become depressed, because you have lost the most precious thing. Safety is**

**happiness; you are happier when you feel safe.... We lost our sense of safety, and if you lose that, you lose your happiness, you lose your inner peace. I swear to God, sometimes, when things get bad, I stop eating, even if I am hungry. The situation is bad; when you lose your security, you cannot even think of happiness, and all the thoughts become sad because you anticipate the worst. Sometimes, I can't think properly because of the stress."**

The community's collective sense of insecurity further erodes social cohesion, a crucial element for both communal and individual resilience. This destabilization is intensified for communities facing systemic violence, confiscations, assaults, military surveillance and exercises, night raids, excessive use of force, and movement restrictions. The loss of privacy and security in the private sphere also destroys the mental safe space within the community, leading to a profound sense of vulnerability and helplessness and undermining the stability and safety of the community. The ongoing military and settler surveillance and interference fundamentally disrupt everyday routines, cultivating a climate of fear and anxiety.

Furthermore, the enduring sense of injustice and systematic discrimination over many years heightens the feelings of helplessness. Rather than protect the shepherding communities, Israeli law enforcement exacerbates their encounters with injustice and powerlessness. As one resident lamented, **"We file complaints at the Shaar Binyamin Police Station, but they never end up in court... Even if you bleed and everyone sees it, you will still be guilty, and the settler will be innocent. We have become animals in a jungle."** Feeling denied justice and lacking legal protection amplifies their insecurity and fosters mistrust.

## **2. Disrupting the family unit**

The routine violence, trauma, and daily insecurity lead to a constant state of alertness and insomnia. When one of the interviewees expelled from Ein Samiya was asked whether he felt fear, he responded that they are in a constant state of fear: **"I swear to God, we didn't sleep at**

**night because we were constantly expecting something to happen, to be attacked, we were afraid for our children.”** He noted that the violence escalated in the past two years, reaching a point where settlers began breaking into their homes at night, posing threats to them and their children. These circumstances are particularly distressing for parents as they navigate the responsibility of protecting their children and ensuring their emotional well-being, all while managing their own stress and anxiety: **“There are settlers every 2-3 kilometers, and they come at night; how can I protect my children at night when they show up?”**

The theme of vulnerability was consistently present in our interviews and discussions with community members, especially in light of their inability to safeguard their families and children. It was evident that they live in constant fear for their lives and the lives of their loved ones, anticipating an impending tragedy. This sense of looming danger and defenselessness was pervasive in all our interactions with community members. One father expressed his concern for the safety of his children and family amidst the ongoing threat of violence, stating: **“What can you do when settlers stake out in front of your house? How can you protect your children? They beat us up when we leave on tractors to collect water. You cannot protect someone who leaves for work at 7-8 pm; it has become unbearable.”**

### **3. Community fragmentation and social isolation**

Years of Israeli occupation and settlement expansion have eroded the social cohesion inherent in Bedouin communities in Area C. The expulsion and displacement of the communities have influenced their socio-political dynamics and weakened their social structures. As a result, all community members have suffered the loss of sense of security and belonging afforded by the social network. This experience of isolation was apparent in a conversation with one community member: **“We were forced to disperse; what choice was there? We only remain in contact through phone calls; everyone has dispersed.”** Apart from the physical separation, this social fragmentation also signifies the erosion of collective identity and crucial social support structures

essential for community resilience. Isolation also carries extensive emotional and cultural consequences, resulting in individuals losing their support systems and access to traditional community gatherings. That which has been lost may never be recovered.

#### **4. Deepening economic crisis**

Movement restrictions and prevented access to pastoral lands and water have stifled these communities' primary livelihood sources. **"Devastation, there is nothing left... Devastation, we have dispersed, we are in financial ruin; there is nothing left to fear."** The Bedouin communities traditionally live near grazing areas and water sources, moving locations seasonally. The seizure of lands and natural resources and limitations on movement and land use have forced changes to customary lifestyles. State appropriation of lands and their subsequent categorization as "closed military zones" or "nature reserves" have severely blocked access to vital resources. Discussing the mobility restrictions and their impact on shepherding, an interviewee noted that **"the sheep have nowhere to graze; they are confined within barbed wire enclosures. This terrain is unsuited for sheep in the winter. They will die from the cold and snow."** Palestinian shepherds have, therefore, been forced to buy sheep feed rather than allow them to graze on the expansive lands of Area C, leading to mounting debt and deepening economic strains. These factors cause significant distress and disrupt their ways of life. As another community member noted, **"It used to be different; I used to move freely. Now, if I travel to Ramallah for something important, I am constantly concerned about returning home quickly. Why? Because I fear something will happen to the community and my children while I am away."**

Uncertainties about the future and the possibility of attacks, property loss, and forced displacement have grown to define the lives of the communities we visited. These conditions rob them of the ability to plan for their futures. When asked about the prospects for his children and other youth in the community, one interviewee responded that continuing the traditional livelihood of grazing, as their ancestors



had done for generations, would be unfeasible, given the scarcity of lands and the financial hardships forcing them to sell their sheep. The coercive environment in which these communities reside erodes their traditions and practices, economic independence, livelihoods, and overall cohesion.

The changes forced upon these communities are not temporary, shrouding their futures in uncertainty and disrupting their natural communal development. Addressing these challenges requires significant communal and individual efforts and resources, reshaping social structures to prioritize survival over growth and development.

## Conclusion

This position paper was drafted during an unprecedented time in the history of the Israeli occupation. Israel's military assault on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, particularly the Gaza Strip, has resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands, including entire families. It has triggered a public health crisis, the displacement of over a million and a half people, and widespread arrests and sieges of cities and villages. Beyond individual harm, Israeli aggression is systematically dismantling the Palestinian family unit, community, and nation.

While prior PHRI reports focused on the impact of the Israeli occupation on individuals and families,<sup>11</sup> this position paper delves into the experiences of Palestinian Bedouin herding communities in Area C of the West Bank. These communities face systematic violence from settlers and Israeli security forces, along with forced expulsion. Israel strategically aims to make their lives unbearable through land expropriation, disrupting traditional lifestyles, and prohibiting the construction of homes, agricultural structures, and public spaces. These communities are deprived of access to water and electricity infrastructure and forbidden from paving roads. When they attempt to do so out of necessity, Israel issues threats and often follows

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<sup>11</sup> Miryam Wijler (2020). "A LIFE EXPOSED: Military invasions of Palestinian homes in the West Bank." Yesh Din. [https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/Exposed\\_Life\\_2020/Exposed\\_Life\\_ENG.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/Exposed_Life_2020/Exposed_Life_ENG.pdf)

through with demolitions. The climate of intimidation, insecurity, and uncertainty carries various psychological consequences and weakens community resilience.

At the core of these policies is the illegal goal of forced population transfer. The forced displacement of Palestinians from their lands by the occupying power is part of a deliberate strategy designed to secure territorial control and sustain Jewish dominance in the West Bank. In the process, Israel is destroying communities and scarring their collective consciousness. Through interviews with community members, this position paper outlines the severe repercussions of Israel's policies, aiming to provide evidence substantiating our assertion of systematic forced expulsion.

The international community must acknowledge that these acts of forced displacement constitute severe violations of international humanitarian law. Article 49 of the Geneva Convention for the Protection of Civilians in Time of War (1949) prohibits any "individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory."<sup>12</sup> Customary International Humanitarian Law Rule 129, as defined by the International Red Cross, similarly prohibits such acts. The infringement of this prohibition is not only a breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention as per Article 147 but is also categorized as a crime against humanity and, during times of war, qualifies as a war crime under Articles 7 and 8 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) (Rome Statute of the ICC).<sup>13</sup> The 'forced' aspect of this displacement is not limited to physical force; it encompasses various forms of coercion, such as psychological oppression, abuse of power, and the establishment of a coercive environment that leaves the affected individuals with no viable option but to abandon their homes and lands.

The authors of this position paper urge the international community to fulfill its responsibilities under international law by formally

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<sup>12</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (1949). Geneva Convention IV Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, Article 49. [Online]. Retrieved from: <https://www.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/380>

<sup>13</sup> International Criminal Court (1998). Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (A/CONF.183/9). Retrieved from [<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>]

acknowledging these rights violations, actively opposing them, and implementing an action plan to prevent their perpetuation. The evidence outlined in this position paper, along with numerous other reports by rights groups, calls for a response that goes beyond simple acknowledgment. It necessitates active engagement in preventing ongoing oppression and forced displacement, as well as ensuring the protection of the affected communities. Moreover, the international community must insist that Israel be held accountable for the violations that have already taken place.

Israel must take immediate action to prevent settler violence and acts of forced displacement, ensuring the protection of the rights of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This includes upholding their right to life, health, self-determination, and freedom from discrimination. Additionally, Israel must guarantee unrestricted access to essential services in Palestinian areas, including healthcare, water, electricity, and infrastructure development.

Palestinian communities in Area C require urgent protective actions that go beyond the framework of international humanitarian law. Decisive measures must be implemented to safeguard their rights, prevent their displacement, and facilitate their return, enabling them to reclaim their dignity and the right to live securely. This includes ensuring their right to cultivate land, graze their livestock, build homes, and enjoy access to natural, social, and political resources. The international community must take a firm stance against these breaches of international law and persistently work towards a future in which the health, development, well-being, and resilience of these communities are not merely ideals but a concrete reality.

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