

May 25, 2018

The Hon. Chrystia Freeland,
Minister: Foreign Affairs

Dear Minister Freeland,

I am writing to you as chair of the United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel (UNJPPI), a network of members and friends of the United Church of Canada, to ask you to urgently apply diplomatic and public pressure to stop the imminent demolition of the Palestinian villages of Khan Al Ahmar and other threatened villages in the occupied West Bank.

We have just learned that the Israeli Supreme Court has ordered the demolition of the only shelter for dozens of Bedouin families from Khan al-Ahmar and the "Tire School" in which 165 children study, as well as the sheep pens that provide shelter for 850 sheep in Khan Al Ahmar. The panel of judges, headed by settler judge Noam Sohlberg, decided that they were only concerned with the fact that the structures had been built without permits and not Israel's obligations under international law, humanitarian considerations or that no viable alternative had been offered to the community. It is well documented that Israel does not allow the Bedouin to receive building permits, nor to plan their communities in a way that suits their way of life. Israel is now allowed to demolish the homes and school at any time beginning June 1, 2018.

Demolitions and forcible displacement of Khan Al Ahmar, Susiya and similar communities are a gross violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention:

- This forced relocation is a form of collective punishment in violation of Article 33.
- Article 49 prohibits all forcible transfers of civilian populations by an occupying power.
- Article 50 obligates the occupying power to ensure the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children. The demolition orders also target schools in these villages. For your information, beyond these villages, Israel has recently demolished three other schools in the occupied Palestinian territory.
- Article 53 prohibits the destruction of personal property by an occupying power unless it is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations.

Further, this action can be construed as an act of systematic oppression by the Israeli government committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one ethnic group over a different ethnic group. This is prohibited under the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid: Article II (d).

Additionally, there are reports that the village residents will be forced to move to a location near the Jerusalem garbage dump. The stench from the dump is intolerable.

The fate of the people of Khan al-Ahmar is at the discretion of the Israeli defense minister. International pressure is crucial for deterring Israel from carrying out this war crime."

In 2013, I served as a human rights observer in Palestine and Israel on behalf of the World Council of Churches. On one of my visits to Khan Al Ahmar in 2013, I was privileged to take the First Secretary at our embassy in Tel Aviv, to meet some of the people in the village.

Beyond the legalities, demolitions of entire villages leave hundreds of children, like the ones in the pictures from Khan Al Ahmar, and rob them of their traditional life style that is centuries old.



Over the past four years, the settlers' supporters in the Knesset, led by the subcommittee on West Bank settlement issues of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, have increased pressure on Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories to carry out the demolition orders so the land can be used to expand illegal settlements.

Morally and ethically, this action by the state of Israel is reprehensible, repulsive and repugnant. Our government, as a High Contracting party to the Fourth Geneva Convention is obligated to do all in its power to prevent this violation of international law. Further, this action flies in the face of SC 2334 by the Israeli government. This represents yet another major obstacle to the peace process.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, you speak eloquently and frequently about the need to protect and defend human rights. Based on our treaty obligations and as a nation that supports international peace, I believe you are duty bound to publicly support the human rights of Palestinians in this instance.

I urge you to send representatives of the Canadian diplomatic missions in Palestine and Israel to visit Khan Al Ahmar and Susiya **immediately**. It is worth noting that in 2015, European Union representatives [visited the Palestinian village of Susiya](#), which was threatened with demolition. International publicity and diplomatic pressure from this visit was vital in halting the planned demolitions at that time.

Please take urgent action to stop this imminent violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and to uphold Canada's tradition of supporting human rights. On behalf of especially the children who welcomed me in Khan Al Ahmar and members of UNJPPI, I look forward to your response.
Sincerely,

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