Destruction of homes and dreams
Jerusalemite women tell their stories of demolition, displacement and eviction.
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Field Interviews:
Kathy Keary
Eman Sharabati
Ala Adileh

Prepared by:
Aseel Al Atrash
Amjad Afghani
Zeinab Kaloti
Eman Sharabati

Translation to English:
Reem Shraydeh

Data:
Anas Abdeen- Al-Maqdese DataBank

Edited by:
General Manager-Moaz Zatari

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Al-Maqdese for Society Development (MSD) is a civic non-profit and non-governmental organization that was established in Jerusalem on February 19th, 2007, by academics, doctors, teachers, and social activists. MSD came as a reaction to Israel's routine violations of Palestinians’ human, social, economic, and political rights in Jerusalem.

MSD works to protect and defend Palestinians' rights, ensure respect for the rule of law, and promote the principles of democracy in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We aim to defend Palestinians' rights in the Jerusalem district both locally and abroad. Additionally, Al-Maqdese works to disclose, document, and publish Israeli violations against Palestinians' rights, and demands that the Israeli authorities stop these violations and respect Palestinians' individual and collective rights according to the provisions and rules of international law.

Vision: That Palestinians in East Jerusalem enjoy all their political, social, and economic rights.

Mission: To maintain the existence of the Palestinian population in Jerusalem by: raising awareness and ensuring protection of their rights; monitoring, documenting, and publicizing the Israeli violations against their rights; and providing advocacy and lobbying tools to protect their rights.

The strategic goals are:

- To defend and protect Palestinians' human rights in Jerusalem
- To raise awareness among Palestinians in Jerusalem of their rights under international human rights and humanitarian law
- To continue improving the organization's abilities to achieve its mission and vision

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1. Introduction

“My son who is five years old was home alone. Suddenly, he looked around him and saw Israeli police forces inside the house, in addition to numerous soldiers and police forces encircling the house. They started throwing dishes and the furniture from the windows. My son started crying “I want to talk to my mom”, but no one answered him. They even cut the phone line off. After a few minutes, I reached home and saw what had happened. The first thing I did was embrace my little son.”

This painful scenario is a reality, experienced by a large number of Jerusalemite women and feared by thousands more, who live with the threat of displacement as part of their everyday lives. The mother narrating above, told us during the interview, about the feelings of anguish her son experienced because of the soldier’s attack on the house, and the intimidation and inhuman treatment carried out by the soldiers against the child.

The stories of the women in this book reflect a real pain resulting from the ongoing violations of basic human rights perpetuated by the Israeli Authorities against the Arab population of East Jerusalem. Some of the most egregious manifestations of the systematic denial of basic

1. Testimony from L.S, from the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.
tenets of human rights for the population of East Jerusalem are the practices of forced transfer and displacement carried out since 1967.

We targeted the women of East Jerusalem for the purposes of this book because of their daily experiences of violations of residency rights and the right to freedom of movement, as well as their ongoing exposition to displacement, homelessness and family break-up. This bitter reality affects the Jerusalemite women physically, psychologically, socially, and economically. This experience of displacement and demolition is particularly important when the role of the woman in maintaining family ties is taken into consideration. Keeping relationships strong within the family unit is important because it is these relationships that provide the foundation for a home and carry the memories of the family. Statistics from the Al-Maqdese Databank indicate that 1,152 Jerusalemite women were evicted from their homes and rendered homeless from the beginning of 2000 until March 2011. Currently the Al-Maqdese Databank also has details of 1,195 Jerusalemite women living at risk of forced displacement, the real figure is however much greater than this and these numbers are constantly increasing. It is therefore essential to support displaced Jerusalemite women and those threatened with displacement.

To improve such a bitter reality, Al-Maqdese has sought to provide assistance to Jerusalemite women through the project “Promoting peace opportunities through ending exploitation of woman’s rights in East Jerusalem”. This project aims to raise the awareness of displaced Jerusalemite women, and those threatened with displacement, of their rights. It also aims to strengthen the women of East Jerusalem, train them to ensure respect and recognition of their rights, and empower them through the provision of economic and legal assistance. Moreover, Al-Maqdese’s team of field-researchers document the occurrence of rights violations in order to attract international interest and concern and to ensure adequate services are available to assist with their legal, social, psychological and economic situations.

This book of stories documents the violations of women’s rights in East Jerusalem, detailing the experiences of those who have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of the Israeli policies of demolition, eviction, and forced displacement. Such documentation is important because it highlights several ignored details of the violations, which are in grave contravention of international human rights standards.

Jerusalemite women in neighborhoods such as Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, Jabal Al-Mukaber and Beit Hanina are exposed to similar experiences of eviction, demolition, and displacement. Israeli practices include taking control of land and property under the absentee property law and transferring it to Jewish settlers, expropriating land designated for “public interest”, claiming state land alleged to have religious, historical or environmental importance, securing title to land which is claimed to have been owned by Jews prior to 1948 and confiscating land considered to have strategic importance. In many cases land is expropriated through fraudulent means and with the use of forged or false documentation.
Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states (UDHR) «(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.»
2. Al-Bustan neighborhood-Silwan

Silwan is a neighborhood located in the southeastern part of the Old City. It lies within the overcrowded area between the Mount of Olives and Mount Zion, leading to Jabal Al-Mukaber neighborhood.

During the past decade, more than 300 Palestinian residents of Silwan, 200 of which are children, have been rendered homeless as a result of the Israeli policy of illegal home demolitions. Currently, Israel is implementing a comprehensive plan which aims to demolish the entire neighborhood of Al-Bustan, displacing the 1,000 Palestinian residents who are living there. The main purpose behind this measure is to build what is called a “biblical park” or the King David National Park on the ruins of the neighborhood.

To further control the town, El’ad, the Jewish settler organization, has exploited the Absentee Property Law and used it extensively in Silwan. This practice came after taking control of numerous sites in Silwan in 1997 including archeological and excavation sites. Settler associations have used the excuse of site excavations and historical significance as a political weapon against the Palestinian residents of Silwan.

Most of the home demolitions in Silwan are the result of administrative demolition orders, this means that these homes were built or extended without the required building permits. The Israeli authorities claim that such orders are executed only on illegal buildings; that is those built without permits.

However, obtaining a permit is almost impossible due to the neglect and delay of Israeli authorities in preparing necessary structural urban plans to provide for and facilitate the natural growth of the population in East Jerusalem. UNOCHA (United Nations Office For Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) reports, that the expensive costs and complicated requirements, for securing a building permit, renders it almost impossible for most Palestinian families to obtain one, forcing families to build illegally. The Israeli authorities expropriate the land either by declaring the building as illegal or as a categorizing the land as “public property”.

Accordingly, home demolition orders in Al-Bustan neighborhood are executed as a result of the building not having the required permits. Israeli authorities refuse to give building permits due to the lack of proof of land ownership, but in order to prove land ownership Palestinians have to endure overly bureaucratic and costly procedures in accordance with Jordanian land law. Only in extremely rare cases are permits ever granted.

2. Home demolitions in Jerusalem 2010, Al-Maqdese for Society Development
Aida Al-Resheq

“Now we are living in the Al- Bustan neighborhood in Silwan, we used to live in a rented house in the same neighborhood. For ten years, we lived in a rented house and then we built this house four years ago. I am originally from Silwan, I was raised here, my family lived here, and I got married here. After ten years of living in the rented house, I got this land from my parents. Now the Israelis are saying it belongs to them, but our land ownership dates back hundreds of years.”

A historical relationship ties Aida with her house and her land, she was raised there as a child and now she raises her own children in the same neighborhood, on the same land. Aida loves the Al-Bustan neighborhood and even its name means a lot to her, it reminds her of her mother and grandmother. Aida says, “People in Silwan know that this land has always been planted with different kinds of fruit, Al-Bustan means the garden. People used to live of this land and I remember what my mother told me about it; people used to plant there and at harvest time they used to sell these vegetables and fruits and live from the money.”

Aida says that the Israeli authorities claim that the Al-Bustan neighborhood is built on public land belonging to the state-“Accordingly, they don’t grant us with building permits. However, after we lived in a small rented house we built a house on our own land even though we didn’t have enough money”.

Currently, the family is living day to day with the ongoing threat of displacement, and the house, which took months to build, is now in danger of being demolished. Aida narrates the story of her house: -- “In 2007, during the first month of building the house, the Israelis came and they took pictures of it, the house didn’t have any windows and doors yet. Then they wrote on the outside of it ‘90% possibility of demolition’. I had to move very quickly into the house, although it was not ready yet, to protect it. In February 2008, after we were living in the house, the Israeli police came with municipality employees. It was 8 in the morning and it was raining. My husband spoke to them but they entered the house violently. We were unarmed and I was with my seven children, the eldest was 11 years old and the youngest was one and a half. As they entered the house, the children were trying to hide behind me and my husband and crying out of fear but the soldiers continued to frighten them. We asked the soldiers- ‘why are you doing this? Just take what you want and leave the children be’. They took the information from us and told us that this is not our land and that they would demolish our house. They then took my ID card and left.”
That night, my husband’s blood pressure soared and he had a heart attack. He was placed in intensive care for four days; his heart was weak and he was in a very bad mental state.

Since that day, we have received several court decisions. We would go to the lawyer and then to the court only to receive a notice to evacuate the house. Lately, we received an order fining us 40,000 Shekels (around 11,000 US$) and an order freezing the demolition until August. If we do not go back to the court again and ask for another extension of the demolition, they will demolish the house without any warning. At the same time, you have to pay money for the people demolishing the house, around 150,000 Shekels.

Such threats happened due to the claim that the land belongs to the state and that the building is illegal. The judge told me that: ‘if you miss one payment we will put you in jail’, then I asked the lawyer if they would put me a woman in jail and he said yes they can.

We share the same problems with our neighbors and we talk about them all the time. We do not rely on any organizations help because we know that Israel has broken all the laws and standards and they refuse to listen to any organization. We complain to many people and international organizations, even people from the American congress. I spoke to Jimmy Carter and he told me very clearly, ‘I don’t promise you that I will be able to do anything but I promise that I will deliver your voice’. When Jimmy Carter met the head of the municipality, he told him my story so maybe they will change their mind. However, after they met I received a threatening letter from the municipality. Then, I got a call from them; they said ‘your message was delivered through Jimmy Carter and we don’t believe your crocodile tears, having your child sitting on his lap won’t make us change our decision.’ At this point, I got emotional and started crying and my husband took the phone. They told him, ‘I promise you that we won’t only demolish your house, we will make you build houses for us’. That week we had a sudden court decision saying we should immediately demolish our house. However, we sought the help of some lawyer to delay the demolition decision.

Nowadays, my children spend most of their times at home and even my eldest son can’t go alone to the supermarket due to the military presence around the house. I have to be with my children wherever they go out because it is not safe here. It’s very hard to feel safe even in your own house; we can’t even support our children by giving them the feeling of security because we can’t feel it ourselves.”

At the end of the interview, Aida took us on a small tour around her house, which is filled with traditional hand-made works and clearly means a lot to her.
Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honor and reputation.”
3. Sheikh Jarrah Neighborhood

Sheikh Jarrah is a Palestinian neighborhood located to the north of the Old City in Eastern Jerusalem. The area is home to 2,700 Palestinian residents and it contains a number of famous sites including the previously known Orient House, and the Palestinian National Theatre, in addition to several diplomatic and international missions.

Due to its strategic location, settlers have made tremendous efforts since 1972 to take over the land; to date they have succeeded in confiscating several areas within the neighborhood:

1. **Karam Al Jaouny Area**: Since 2008, 60 Palestinians have been expelled by force from their homes, which were then handed over to settlers. Settlers are determined to evict a further 28 homes, housing 300 Palestinians, who moved to the neighborhood in 1956 with the support of UNRWA.

2. **Kabanya Um Haroun**: The Israeli High Court issued a decision in favor of a settler group who claimed that they owned the land prior to 1948. Settlers have already put measures in place to expel two families in this area. The decision of the Israeli courts means that 200 Palestinians within the area are at risk of expulsion and displacement in order to establish a new settlement.

3. **Shepherd Hotel**: The hotel and the land on which it was built were confiscated in 1967. The settler organization which bought it has obtained permission to build a new settlement on this land.

4. **Karam Mufti**: The ownership of this land was transferred to the settler organization “Atertet Cohanim,” which is preparing to establish a settlement of 250 housing units.

5. **The Head of Amana settler organization**: In 2009, the municipality of Jerusalem granted the organization a permit to establish a building of 3 apartments and a conference center on land belonging to the Saint Joseph Hospital in Sheikh Jarrah.

6. **Jewish religious educational institution (Glasman Campus)**: An empty plot of land beside Al-Hayat medical center was confiscated to build a Jewish religious educational institution.

Settler organizations use several methods to achieve their goals. Israeli authorities have confiscated a number of properties using complicated legal provisions, but have also used administrative and institutional mechanisms to facilitate land and property seizures. In many cases settler organizations used the Israeli law to prove their claimed ownership of land prior to 1948.

Recently, the neighborhood has been exposed to several attempts at forced displacements and evictions in order to build new settlements.

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Noufouth Hammad currently lives in her home in Sheikh Jarrah but her house is threatened with eviction. Noufouth is always anxious but she is mostly concerned about her granddaughters’ reactions towards such evictions and how they are being affected.

“The family of my husband was displaced from Haifa and came to Jerusalem after 1948, while my family already lived in Jerusalem. In 1975 we were married, and we lived in our house in Sheikh Jarrah, my husband’s family’s property. The whole area was built at the same time through the UNRWA project implemented in the fifties. We have four boys and five girls, now some of the girls have gotten married but we have three other families living in the same building, my son’s family, my husband’s brother and the son of my sister in law, all in all we are 16.

Since the seventies, we have faced problems with the Jewish settlers. Our house is very near to the cave that the Jews pray in, so for a very long time they have tried to take the house. They have jumped on our walls and many times have tried to enter our house. In March 2011, there was a court hearing after sending us an eviction notice with the names of all the family members but it has been postponed until November.”

Postponing the hearing doesn’t mean that there will be any future tranquility in the family’s life. Daily clashes and provocations from settlers and soldiers have already negatively affected Noufouth’s son, the only financial provider for the family. Her son
has been forced to quit his job several times because of where he lives. Nofouth says” My husband hasn’t worked for a while and my son has been unemployed for 4 months. He used to work as a driver for physically disabled people and he used to park the work’s car in front of the house. However, the company took the car from him and fired him due to their fear of the clashes that took place in Sheik Jarrah. The same thing happened again when he got a job driving for a factory in Hebron, he drove the car from Hebron to Jerusalem and when he parked it in front of his house the settlers attacked it, and so he was fired again. This happened again for the third organization he worked for.

My son graduated in Ukraine as a denturist. He can’t find a job in Israel because he spent some time in jail when he was 16 and Israel maintains his security file. He has also worked for the British Council, but they fired him once they found out he had been in jail. In recent times he always takes part in the demonstrations that take place in Sheikh Jarrah because he wants to protect his neighborhood, as a result his file is always active and updated and he can’t get work in Israel.”

Noufouth expresses her sadness “I can’t imagine leaving my house or even thinking about it. It hurts me to hear my granddaughters saying, ‘Will they take our food and our toys?’.”

Despite the family’s fear and insecurity, Noufouth said, “My granddaughter drew the Palestinian flag and told me that she wants to participate in the protests against the Israeli occupation.”
En’am Qneibi

First Picture : A Picture of Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood

En’am has lived in the same house since before 1967. En’am knows little about the political and legal reasons for forced displacement and eviction in the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. However, she shared with us her concern about her house saying, “They sent us an eviction notice and we sent it to a lawyer to follow-up the case. However, since December 2010 nothing has happened.”

En’am and her family live in two apartments, which received eviction notices. She is living in one, and her son is living in the other one. She lives by herself in her own house since her husband died six years ago. Her son has five children so they are seven in that apartment. The rest of her children are married and have moved away.

En’am talks about the effect of the eviction order on her, “I gave birth to all of my children in this house. They got married and they lived in it with me and their children. We live in this house which is not properly sheltered; its roofs are made of Zinco, but I feel happy at my home and I want to spend the rest of my life in it.”

She added “My son is suffering from infantile paralysis and he can’t move easily. My grandchildren have been exposed to this unstable reality and they are always thinking about the situation.”

Qneibi prays that her problems will be solved and that she will not be forced to live in the street in the end!
Khadija Al-Sabbagh is part of a refugee family that has been displaced a number of times. She currently lives in the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, but she is conscious that her home may be taken by settlers at anytime. She says, “My family lived in Jaffa before the year 1948, however, during the Nakba my family left to Syria and I was born there. Afterwards, I came back to my homeland.

We built our house during the rule of Jordan over Jerusalem but the second floor was built during the Israeli occupation, in the year 1986. Seven years after building the second floor we received heavy fines and we had several problems with the Israeli court. The fines amounted to 90,000 shekels. After much effort, we were able to pay the fine in the form of monthly payments, each payment amounting to 700 shekels.”

However, payment of the fines does not mean that the problem is solved, instead, the use of the fines is a method through which the municipality can collect money, disregarding any financial consequences that might befall the family. In spite of paying these fines the family is often subjected to further court appearances, and additional demands for money, and ultimately their house may still end up being demolished.

Khadija says, “Theses fines accumulated for seven years. We live in our house for 12
years and we submitted the required documents to obtain a permit three years ago but until now we still haven’t received a permit!”

Restrictions on movement and economic activities affect the family both socially and psychologically “We suffered various kinds of psychological torture. I feel that I can’t bear myself and I am even embarrassed to say this to people. Sometimes we were able to eat but other times we weren’t. Some people help us financially because my husband’s salary is spent almost entirely on fines and taxes.”

The family constantly feels threatened because it is located next to a house seized by settlers in 2007. Clashes between the neighborhood residents and the Jewish settlers are a common occurrence. Through her tears Khadija explained “I can’t leave my house because Jewish settlers live right next to my home and they provoke us almost every day. Also, I can’t leave the house because I have to protect my children from the settlers. They accused me of burning the tent they were living in which I didn’t. I have high blood pressure and I have a problem in my skull because I was hit by a settler. I went to the hospital to get a medical report but they didn’t give it to me. The settler was interrogated but not arrested, this accident happened two years ago. My grandchildren complain about the limited space and about the fear of playing in the dangerous area around their home.”

Khadija was called before the court for the non-payment of fees for the land. Khadija
Destruction of homes and dreams

They claim that the land is theirs and that they have proof of their ownership. We were obliged to pay for the land out of fear that the Israeli authorities might issue an eviction notice. Khadija’s family paid the fees but didn’t sign the land contract, because if she did it could be seen as acknowledgement of the settler’s ownership.

Khadija ends her story “Nothing will stop us from staying here, even if it costs us our lives. It is a Palestinian country and they were the ones who occupied our land not us.”
Nahid Al-Sabagh

First Picture: One of the confiscated homes in Sheikh Jarrah

Nahid has lived in her house, right next to Khadija Al-Sabagh, for more than 22 years. She and Khadija live in similar conditions with both having received fines and eviction notices.

All of the seven members of Nahid’s family have been adversely affected by abuse from the Israeli forces and settlers besieging their house.

Nahid says, “We don’t talk to them, we avoid them all the time. They provoke us but we ignore them. The settlers who confiscated nearby houses are armed and working in the Israeli army. When my child was four she got in a fight with a settler and a policeman said he was going to arrest the child and take her to prison if it happened again.”

Nahid’s house is under the control of the security forces employed to guard the settlers. The settlers tirelessly provoke and intimidate their Palestinian neighbors, “The settlers want us to hate our lives. Now we have become afraid and suspicious of everything, whenever the electricity cuts off we think that a new eviction order will be executed. We don’t turn off the lights at night because if we do the settler’s guard post shines bright lights on the windows of the house which frighten the children.”

Settlers have not only confiscated nearby Palestinian houses but they have also expropriated nearby lands. Nahid says, “As a mother, I should bear difficulties and be
strong. I can’t complain to the Israeli judge because he shares the same goal with the settler, confiscating homes and lands. If we are actually forced out of our homes, we don’t have any alternative option. My children refuse to live behind the wall or in the West Bank. Even though we live in an overcrowded and restricted space they want to stay in Jerusalem.”

The houses of Nahid and Khadija Al-Sabagh are located next to a number of houses that have already been confiscated by settlers, which increases the Al-Sabagh family’s threat of eviction. Palestinian families, such as the Al-Sabaghs, are still clinging to their residency rights and are striving to remain in their own homes on their own land despite the pressures put on them.

“The day of the eviction was a horrible day. On that day, I had a feeling that this would be the day of eviction so I told the children to be alert. At that time, we had installed a tent at the door of the house, a protest tent for all the people who wanted to say no to the situation. The Israeli and foreign supporters were around us 24 hours a day.

On that day, we went to sleep at 3am but the children were still awake sitting on the stairs as if they were demonstrating to protect their own house. At 5am, the children were screaming asking us to wake up, they came into the house and closed the doors.
Then we heard glass breaking and the soldiers entered the house from the windows. The first child they evicted from the house was my daughter who was 13 years old. Then, they evicted the rest of the family and put our furniture outside the home.

Earlier that day, I had sent my daughter to play tae-kwon-do to let her get out her feelings of frustration and so that she could protect herself from the soldiers, but the child couldn’t do anything when the operation happened, she was afraid. My other child was 17 years old when we were evicted. She was even stronger than me and she told the soldiers ‘leave my mother, don’t hurt my mother’.

They took my son Rami, ripped his clothes and threw him outside. We left the house in our pyjamas, walking on broken glass in our bare feet. They tried to take my husband to a certain corner of the house and evacuate the rest of the family. We were afraid that they may arrest him again because of the court’s previous threats. The court had tried to pressure us in many ways; they gave us many fines and had told us to evacuate the house or they would arrest my husband again.

In 15 minutes, the whole building, housing three families, was evacuated. They took all of the furniture and threw it in the playing yard in front of the UN agency. We looked at this as a challenge for the UN itself. They took all our phones from us so that we couldn’t call any organization to ask for help. They made us walk along the street away from the house.

During the eviction process, the soldiers took all the food from the fridges and made fun of us, they also took the toys of the children and started playing with them to provoke them. One hour after the eviction, buses of settlers came to the area and settlers took over the houses. We decided to stay under the olive tree that is in front of the house as a sign of resistance against home evictions, especially considering that the number of such operations in Sheikh Jarrah had reached 27.

We spent six months under the tree. We refused at that time to live in any tent; we hated the idea that any evicted Palestinian has to live in a tent. While still under the tree, Ramadan passed, schools opened and winter arrived. Our husbands lost their jobs because many times before the evacuation they had to stay at home to protect the houses, or at least to make sure that the eviction would not happen while they were outside the house. My husband’s company could not give him a long vacation, so they told him to leave his job.

In December 2009, I rented a house so that our children could continue their lives normally but its rent amounted to $1,000 a month. After six months, I searched for a cheaper house but I couldn’t find one so I had to live at my mother’s house for three months.

What I want to say is that all the organizations and consulates say they are coming to help the people of Sheikh Jarrah. Everyone is talking and writing reports about it, but in the end we are still on the street. To this day, I can’t imagine having a settler living in my own house.
I do not trust anyone anymore who visits the neighborhood to help us get our house back. Although that house had an area of only 65 meters square, it was my own palace; now my house is 120 meters square but I do not feel like it’s my house. Leaving the house affected the girls more than anyone else; they saw how the whole family was separated. Now they only see their aunts and uncles every few months.

In April 2002, the Hannoun family was first evicted, they would be unable to live in their own house for five years. Nadia elaborates “In 1999, an eviction notice was issued but was then frozen until 2002. At that time, my children were young and 17 people live in the three-storey building.

After the final order in 2002 we lived on the streets for a few days. We then rented houses until 2006, the year when the Israeli high court issued an order saying that settlers would have to present documents to the court to prove ownership of the land. Because the settlers don’t have such documents, they could not take over our house. Despite this, the settlers had attempted to break the locks on our homes; we called the Israeli police but they did nothing. When we came back to our house we found the doors open and that it had no furniture.

Between 20082009-, we received several threats of eviction for the second time. In 2008, my husband went to jail because he refused to comply with the court decisions. What was surprising was that between 2006 and 2008 no new court decisions were issued! My husband was left with two choices; to either get out of the house by himself or be arrested. Since he chose to stay, he was jailed for three months.

The court asked my husband to give them the key of the house or they would extend the period of arrest, however, our lawyer had documents proving our house ownership and that it doesn’t belong to any settler. Also, the lawyer has the coordinates of the plots of land over which the settlers claim their ownership and our house does not fall within these areas. Although we had historical and legal evidence of our ownership, the court’s aim was to evict us.

In March 2009, the Israeli court sent a new eviction notice which gave us only 15 days to evacuate the house. We sought help from consulates, international organizations, human rights organizations and UNRWA. They all visited our house and wrote reports about it but in the end, we were evicted from our house.

During the weekly demonstrations in Sheikh Jarrah, I get provoked each time I see my own house, so close yet not mine anymore. I feel that the lemon tree we planted is withering since no one is taking care of it.” With this sorrow, Nadia ended her story and left us. She feels she is powerless to do anything.
'As every day, I woke up early, had breakfast with my family, and dropped the children to their schools. Unfortunately, I left my little child at home because it was so near to the schools, and what happened that day was not expected at all’

With this scenario, L.S. started narrating the story of the demolition of her home in 2011. L.S. who is from Sheikh Jarrah did not wish to mention her name. She lived in her house with the rest of her seven-member family. She continues, ‘My son who is five years old was having his breakfast and watching TV. Suddenly, he looked around him and saw members of the Israeli police force inside the house in addition to numerous soldiers and police encircling the house outside. They started throwing the dishes and the furniture from the windows. My son started crying ‘I want to talk to my mom’ but no one answered him. They even cut the phone line off. After a few minutes I reached home and saw what had happened. The first thing I did was embrace my son and my little daughters, then I sent them immediately to my neighbor so that they would not see the demolition process. The municipality employees actually demolished the house with our furniture inside, even the gold which was given as a dowry for my daughter, is now under the ruins of the house. They didn’t give me a chance to call my husband and relatives to inform them of the operation, my neighbors called my husband and my daughter’s fiancé but they only arrived for the last moments of the demolition.’

The demolition has left the children of L.S. with serious psychological problems. Her son, Raed, witnessed the police’s attack alone, and her daughter, Arij, watched her
mother panicking while the house was being demolished. Raed and Arij feel the loss of their home and the memories it holds. L.S. says, “The demolition process led to the suffering of both Raed and Arij from chronic mental illness. I had to follow-up on their condition and seek the help of a specialized psychiatrist in Hadasa hospital.”

L.S. herself also suffers from chronic anxiety, which is increased by the financial hardship she is facing; on many occasions L.S. finds herself unable to afford the basic needs of her family.

Witnessing her house being turned from a home into a ruin has left lasting effects on L.S.
Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) states “Everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”
4. Jabal Al-Mukabber

Jabal Al-Mukabber is an overcrowded neighborhood located on a hill, to the south of the Old City and Al-Thori neighborhood. It lies near the village of western Al-Sawahre.

El’ad, the Jewish settler organization, claims that some lands in Jabal al-Mukabber are possessed illegally. The Municipality of West Jerusalem has already expropriated at least half the land from Palestinians. The residents in return filed an appeal to the Jerusalem District Court on the basis that the confiscation of their land was illegal. This expropriation of land was executed in Arab areas only, on the basis that these areas have been zoned as “green lands”. However, the Israeli court issued a decision in favor of the Municipality and plans have been drawn up to build the infrastructure for a new proposed settlement on the seized lands of Palestinians.

Jabal Al-Mukabber is divided into two parts: The first part includes 12 small areas annexed to the municipality of Jerusalem, and the second part includes five isolated areas attached to the West Bank. These latter areas are separated from the others by the wall, and their residents are no longer able to enter into Jerusalem or “Israel”.
En’am told us how she succeeded to build her house in Jabal Al-Mukabber despite the harsh conditions: “Before building our house in Jabal Al-Mukabber, we used to live in Silwan in the Wadi Kaddoum neighborhood where I gave birth to my children. I moved from one house to another and rented somewhere in the region of 35 different houses. 14 years ago we bought land in Jabal Al-Mukabber and built our house from wood with a roof made of Zinco. Ever since that time, the electricity company refused to provide us with services and we had no sanitation services.

The house was in bad condition and it was filled with spiders and mice, but my son fixed it and lived there with me. Then, the Israeli authorities sent us a demolition notice and demolished the house. I eagerly want to return to live in that house, it is dear to me because my husband lived and died there. Now I am living in financial hardship due to the numerous rent fees I have paid. I am also sick, I suffer from mental problems and previously I have lapsed into a coma.

My house was demolished in the evening when we were not there, when we arrived back, soldiers tried to hit my children. They demolished the house with the furniture inside, we couldn’t get it out. They also took my sons car, which was parked beside the house, and threw it up on top of the rubble. Six houses were demolished in the neighborhood
En’am started crying with bitterness “I spent all the money I had to build this house. Sometimes I didn’t even buy myself food so I could save the money. I also suffered from constantly moving to different houses, some of my furniture was broken from all the moving. After the demolition we lived in a tent for four months, during this period no one helped us except UNRWA who provided us with gas, water and electricity supplies”.

En’am’s son added, “When we built our houses, our family members lived there. My eldest brother got married and lived with us with his three children. My father used to work in a café and his salary was 50 shekels a day, almost 15 US$. He was the only one who was working at the time but my mother also had the child benefit from the National Insurance Institute of Israel. She spent it all to build the home and she even sold her jewellery. I am the only one who is educated among my brothers because I had two jobs and I was able to afford the education costs. My brothers couldn’t afford these costs and my parents couldn’t help them because of the financial distress they were facing.

En’am and her son are still thinking of ways to get the land back. Her son told us during the interview that he tried to arrange with the Municipality to rebuild their house but his request was rejected. One of the pretexts for this was that the land is designated as “green land” and that the building permit is only granted for land with an area of more than 10 dunums (1dunum =1000 m2) which does not cover En’am’s plot. En’am’s son called on the Palestinian authority to offer its help to Palestinians threatened with home demolitions.
5. Beit Hanina

The town of Beit Hanina is located 8 kms to the northeast of Jerusalem. It is situated between the towns of Shufat and Al-Ram and is at a height of about 700m above sea level. The town has an area of 15,839 dunums and is surrounded by the areas of Hizma, Beir Nabala, Lifta, Shufat, Al Ram and the settlement of Nebi Yacoub.

The Israeli authorities expropriated most of the town’s lands after the area was occupied in 1967. A number of settlements have been established in the area, “Atarot” in 1970 in the northern region, the settlement of “Nebi Yacoub” in 1973 in the eastern region and the settlement “Ramot” in 1973 on the western side.

The town of Beit Hanina has experienced a large number of cases of land expropriation and home demolition for the purpose of settlement expansion. Palestinian residents find it incredibly difficult to get a building permit due to the complex procedures implemented by the municipality.
Rehab has never given up her fighting spirit and has persisted in rebuilding her demolished house again and again. She has five children whom she raised alone, and in 1994 she bought a plot of land in Beit Hanina on which she built her house six years ago. She lived there for only one year before she started receiving demolition notices. She says, “They sent us several fines because the house had no building permit, however, we weren’t the only ones building without permit in the area. Why did they demolish only our house? When I went to the Israeli court, they told me that I have to pay the fine and that they would demolish my house. I told the judge ‘Everyone knows how we built this house and how much effort it took for us. You are trying to put pressure on me by cutting the service of health insurance to force me out. You don’t have the right to demolish my house’.”

Both building and instances of demolition increased in 2005, “In this year, several peace activists visited our house and stayed for one week before its demolition. When the Israeli forces arrived at the house, they asked my son to work with them and if he refused to comply the house would be demolished. My son refused and even my seven year old granddaughter said ironically ‘What kind of work will he do with you, sell lollipops or biscuits for example?’ Then, they told him in Arabic that if he worked with them they would cancel the demolition order but my son refused again.

On the day of the eviction, they labeled us as terrorist and they were hanging around the
area with their dogs. They forced the peace activists to leave, entered our house, evicted us, and demolished the house with the furniture inside. My son couldn’t stand such a scene, he brought a knife and cut the arteries of his arm.

We were given a fine for the demolition costs and because we couldn’t afford it, they sent us another fine of about 5,000 Shekels (1,388 US$). After the house was demolished, we lived in a nearby tent for a year. Several people helped us to rebuild our house and we received many donations. My son developed a clot in his leg. After 10 days of living in the new house, the Israeli forces asked my son again ‘Do you want to work with us?’, they told him that they came to make a deal with him but he continuously refused. They demolished the house once again and we had to return to live in the tent. After one year, members of the peace movement helped us to rebuild the house again.

Then, the Israeli court threatened to arrest me because they warned me not to rebuild the house and they asked me who helped me to build it. After six months of living in it, the house was demolished for the third time and we weren’t even there.”

Rehab is resolute regarding her house, she is still searching for support to build it again. She says, ‘It did not end here. We are still looking for support to build the house again’.”

Rehab currently lives with her son in the neighborhood of Al-Issawye. Although she has numerous health problems such as heart and neurotic problems, diabetes and problems with her eyes, she is strong and determined. She condemns these Israeli violations of her rights and she wishes to return to her home even though it might be demolished again and again.
Despite the fact that her house was demolished twice, once in 2008 and again in 2010, and the ownership issues surrounding her land, at the time of writing Dalal Al Rajabi has succeeded in remaining in her home. In this testimony Dalal refers to the second time her house was demolished which occurred while she was paying a visit to her family in Hebron.

“I was away from my house when the Israelis came to demolish it. I got a call from my relatives telling me the Israelis were destroying my house. Usually the Israelis send a demolition notice before the actual demolition takes place but in my case they didn’t. They took some of the furniture out of the house and gave my family 15 minutes to remove some of our things. After that we stayed for two months in the protest tent offered by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). We fasted for the holy month of Ramadan under extreme heat. After two months, we built the house again with the support of ICAHD (Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions) but I still miss my old house.

Me and my children were crying all the time. The Israelis refused to let us in the house. The children were searching for their things. It was an awful day; I don’t wish anybody to face a day like this. I hope that God will not let any other family face this situation.

My children suffered a lot from the demolition. They have psychological problems
now which affect their performance at school. My daughter is afraid of everything now.”

Concerning the land of her second home, Dalal explains that her family was deceived by the person who sold them the land. She says that they bought the house for 50 thousand shekels (almost 14 thousand US$) but it turned out that the person who sold it to them was not the real owner. The real owner is a resident from Beit Hanina who currently lives in the United States. He hired a lawyer to get the land back and asked for 300 thousand US$ for it. Dalal says, “Not owning the land means that we can’t submit an application for a building permit, this puts us under the threat of demolition for the third time.”

Nevertheless, Dalal keeps her spirits high, she is always smiling. Her main concern now is to take care of her children’s health and education.
After occupying East Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities introduced new legislations to ensure their overall control over the city and its residents. This is in contravention of international law, which prohibits the occupying state from changing the laws in place in occupied territory except in cases of military necessity. The implementation of Israeli local laws and legislation in East Jerusalem is also in grave contravention of the human rights standards provided for in international conventions and charters. These include the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights), ICESCR (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child), CERD (Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Racial Discrimination), CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and CAT (Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment) as well as other international conventions and charters.

The practices of the Israeli authorities also violate the regulations and provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention concerned with the protection of civilians in times of war (1949). The Israeli authorities work tirelessly to besiege, marginalize and exclude...
Palestinians from East Jerusalem in furtherance of their aim to Judaize the city. The Israeli authorities systematically recruit more settlers and have implemented dozens of laws to facilitate the expropriation of Palestinian lands. Meanwhile, Palestinians are denied their legitimate rights to their own lands leaving their communities unable to expand to provide for the natural growth of the local population.