

September 23, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St. NW  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Secretary,

On behalf of the signing organizations, **we are writing to urge the U.S. government to take immediate action to stop the forced transfer of Palestinian Bedouins living in Area C of the occupied West Bank.** As you know, the U.S. has consistently indicated to the Israeli government that building in the E-1 area is unacceptable and, as a State Department spokesman noted in 2012, “would be especially damaging to efforts to achieve a two-state solution.”

In September, Israel published six spatial plans to forcibly transfer Palestinian Bedouins from their communities around Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Jericho and relocate them to planned townships. The published plans show that as many as 7,000 Palestinian Bedouins could be affected. If implemented, the plans will lead to a situation of individual and mass forcible transfers, which are prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention, regardless of the motive. A violation of this nature may be considered a Grave Breach of Article 49, giving rise to individual criminal liability and codified as a war crime.

The six plans have raised serious concern over Israel’s intent to officially annex Area C in order to establish and expand settlements, in violation of international law. The publication of the six plans follow recent moves within the Israeli Knesset in August to de-centralize jurisdiction and expand decision making power over Area C to Knesset sub-committees, which are heavily influenced by Israeli settlement lobby groups.

The plans have also been published within weeks of Israel’s announcement to annex a large piece of Palestinian land situated between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in order to expand the existing settlement of Gush Etzion. The six published plans also include moving Palestinian Bedouins from the politically sensitive E1/Jerusalem Periphery, where the Israeli-approved E1 master plan shows that Israel intends to demolish Bedouin villages in order to expand the settlement of Ma’ale Adumim and link it to settlements between the Jordan Valley and Jerusalem. Settlement expansion in this area could render the two-state solution unachievable, as it would cut the West Bank in half and further isolate Palestinians from Jerusalem.

Area C, which makes up 60 percent of the West Bank, is economically and geographically vital to the sustainability of the Palestinian state, as it contains the natural resources and space necessary for Palestinian development. Although Area C is within the internationally recognized 1967 borders of the occupied Palestinian territory, Israel only allows Palestinians to build on one percent of it. The lack of authority to build makes Palestinians vulnerable to home demolition, displacement, and forcible transfer and limits their ability to realize their rights to water, to adequate shelter, to education, health, and to livelihood. In recent months, Israel has heightened the pressure on Palestinian communities in Area C, using coercive tactics such as demolition and

eviction notices to get them to move off their land. Israel has also restricted the ability of aid agencies to respond to the needs of people affected by demolition, demolishing and seizing aid items. According to data recorded by UN OCHA, Israel has already demolished more than 350 Palestinian homes or livelihood structures in Area C in 2014, 39 of which were demolished in the E1/Jerusalem Periphery. Of these 39 structures, at least 12 were provided by international donors.

Israel has stated that the six plans to relocate Palestinian Bedouins are with their best interests in mind, despite the fact that Bedouin have vehemently opposed them. Around 80 percent of the Bedouin faced with forced transfer are registered refugees, originally from the Negev in what is now the state of Israel. While their lifestyle is no longer nomadic, they do depend on the vast natural resources, mainly open land for grazing, found within their current communities. Similar transfer plans executed by Israel between 1997-2007 had devastating effects on the Palestinian Bedouin who were relocated. Research indicates that, 17 years after the forcible transfer of 150 Bedouin families to a planned township called Al Jabal, life in the township is neither economically nor socially sustainable for the Bedouin, and the impact on women has been particularly harsh.

**We therefore urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure these six transfer plans are cancelled and that Palestinians can remain in and develop their communities. Such steps should include:**

- **Applying immediate and effective pressure on Israel, at the highest political level, to cancel their Bedouin relocation plans.** The United Nations Secretary-General has previously stated that the implementation of “relocation” plans may amount to individual and mass forcible transfers and forced evictions, prohibited under international humanitarian law and human rights law. In their May 2012 Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions, the European Union and member states called on Israel to halt forced transfer in Area C and in their March 2014 EU Heads of Missions report on Jerusalem, the EU and member states recommended that they monitor and respond appropriately to forced transfer of Bedouin communities in the E1. The U.S. and the EU have condemned settlement expansion in the E1, warning that changes to the status-quo in the E1 present a risk to the two-state solution that they support.
- **Calling for a freeze to all outstanding demolition orders in the E1 and the rest of Area C and for Palestinians to have access to a fair and representative planning system.** In a February 2014 UN Secretary General report, the SG called on Israel to: *cease the violations of Palestinians’ human rights resulting from discriminatory and unlawful planning policies, laws and practices. Israel has to, in compliance with international law, amend the planning legislation and processes in order, in particular, to ensure the security of tenure and the full participation of Palestinians. Israel must also refrain from implementing evictions and demolition orders based on discriminatory and illegal planning policies, laws and practices.*
- **Continuing to pledge for and implement humanitarian and development programs for vulnerable communities in Area C, in a manner consistent with international**

**humanitarian law.** International donors should ensure their aid is delivered in a manner consistent with international humanitarian law and that they take all necessary precautions to ensure that their aid efforts do not recognize violations or comply with the coercive environment facilitating the forced transfer of vulnerable communities in Area C.

Thank you for hearing our concerns. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Shan Cretin  
General Secretary  
American Friends Service Committee

Stanley J. Noffsinger  
General Secretary  
Church of the Brethren

Eli S. McCarthy, PhD  
Director of Justice and Peace  
Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Diane Randall  
Executive Secretary  
Friends Committee on National Legislation

Rev. Julia Brown Karimu  
Co-Executive  
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. James Moos  
Co-Executive  
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Gerry G. Lee  
Director  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

J Ron Byler  
Executive Director  
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Grace Said  
Chair  
Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace

Marie Dennis  
Co-President  
Pax Christi International

Sr. Patricia Chappell  
Director  
Pax Christi USA

J. Herbert Nelson  
Director, Office of Public Witness  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Donna Baranski-Walker  
Founder & Executive Director  
Rebuilding Alliance

Susan T. Henry-Crowe, MDiv.DD  
General Secretary  
General Board of Church and Society  
The United Methodist Church