

Occupied Palestinian Territories: UN must support Palestinian grass-roots in combatting Sheikh Jarrah evictions

We, the undersigned human rights defenders, civil society organisations and victims' associations comprising the International Network of Victims and Survivors of Serious Human Rights Abuses (INOVAS) strongly condemn the Israeli government's ongoing aggression towards Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah district.

In standing in solidarity with Palestinians' decades-long struggle against the Israeli occupation, their fight for justice and human rights, genuine peace and recognition, the organisations that make up INOVAS also call on the United Nations to dispatch an urgent monitoring mission to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). That mission should complement, and not talk over, the work already being done on the ground by Palestinian activists and human rights defenders, as well as Palestinian and Israeli human rights and civil society organisations, in documenting violations and fighting back against the Sheikh Jarrah eviction plans.

What's happening in Palestine?

Sheikh Jarrah is a historic neighbourhood in the predominantly Palestinian area of East Jerusalem. Jewish settler groups, with the tacit backing of the Israeli state, have long sought to undermine Palestinian property ownership in the area, claiming that properties were once owned by Jewish residents. On May 2, the Jerusalem District Court ruled that dozens of Palestinian residents of the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah should vacate their homes, making way for Jewish settlers, to resolve this so-called 'property dispute.'

Palestinian protests spread across the OPT and '48 territories' within Israel in solidarity with Sheikh Jarrah residents, prompting waves of racist abuse and mob-led street violence primarily instigated by settler groups and Israeli citizens. Backlash by Palestinian mobs in turn led to a narrative that Israel was on the brink of some 'civil war' fought on its streets, a narrative that obscured the deeply racist and settler colonialist nature of the Israeli state on the one hand, and the unprecedented peaceful street mobilisation by Palestinian activists within Israel itself.

Fierce clashes broke out within the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in early May. With the situation in occupied Jerusalem and Israel escalating, the Gaza Strip broke out into yet another military escalation in which Israeli warplanes and ground forces bombarded the besieged Palestinian enclave for 11 days. Israeli officials repeatedly defended the military's actions, arguing that Palestinian armed factions firing rockets from Gaza into Israel would be met with the measured use of force. And while Hamas-led attacks did reportedly kill a dozen civilians as well as one Israeli soldier, there is no valid comparison in a 'two sides' argument that seeks to equate one of the world's most powerful militaries with Palestinian armed groups besieged within the Gaza Strip. Even then, Palestinian civilians bore the brunt: Israeli forces killed 256 Palestinians including at least 129 civilians, with 14 families losing three or more family members, according to the UN.¹ The Israeli air force deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure including schools and residential blocks, and destroyed offices used by media organisations include *Al Jazeera* and the *Associated Press*, on flimsy claims that armed groups were present in the buildings. Local residents, rights groups and international media organisations have denied these claims.

With abuses ongoing, UN must intervene

On May 21, a ceasefire was reached to end the latest round of hostilities in Gaza. International attention quickly shifted away from the region as if the conflict was over.

¹ UNOCHA, "[Gaza Strip: Escalation of Hostilities \(as of 3 June 2021\)](#)", 6 June 2021.

It was not. Israeli police launched explicitly retaliatory campaign of arrests targeting Palestinian activists or anyone who participated in street protests or clashes at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

The planned ethnic cleansing of East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah is also still in progress. The spectre of evictions remains, and Israeli authorities have conducted numerous violations as a result since the Gaza ceasefire. On June 5, Israeli police violently arrested veteran *Al Jazeera Arabic* journalist Givara Budeiri while she was covering a Palestinian demonstration in Sheikh Jarrah; her left hand was fractured during her arrest, and she was later hospitalised.² Then on June 6, Israeli authorities arbitrarily arrested Muna al-Kurd (23) and then summoned her twin brother, Muhammad al-Kurd (23), for interrogation. The siblings are Palestinian activists and residents of Sheikh Jarrah who've both become important symbols, in their own right, representing the neighbourhood's broader collective resistance. Both were later released.

Crucially, on June 7, Israel's attorney-general, Avichai Mendelbit, informed the Supreme Court that he will not intervene in the Sheikh Jarrah eviction case, ultimately making it more likely that evictions will go ahead.³

In order to halt the evictions as the first step in a broader attempt to hold Israel accountable, the UN should urgently form a monitoring mission to observe and document ongoing violations. INOVAS hopes that this measure could finally challenge the years of impunity enjoyed by Israel in violating UN resolution after UN resolution designed to protect Palestinians' rights and their historic claim to the land from which they have been displaced in wave after wave since the 1948 *Nakba* (catastrophe). As part of its mandate, this UN mission should prioritise engagements with Palestinian civil society, activist networks and grass-roots associations who have lived under, and struggled against, the Israeli occupation for decades.

INOVAS is a network formed by, and for, victims and survivors of serious human rights abuses around the world. Launched in 2021, the network INOVAS aims to re-empower victims and survivors through five core activities: advocacy, empowerment of victims and survivors, protection of activists, documentation, and participatory research. Led by victims and survivors, INOVAS links organisations, groups and individuals from across the world—regardless of their colour, race, religion or belief, culture, nationality, gender, sexual orientation or ethnic origin—and aims to provide victims and survivors with a platform to allow their voices as claim-making agents to be heard, facilitating exchanges and reinforces solidarity between victims and survivors worldwide. The network advocates for their rights, and helps to strengthen their participation in national, regional and international processes related to justice, human rights, social change and peace.

Signatories:

Asociación de víctimas Renacer siglo XXI ("Rebirth in the 21st century" Victims' Association) (Colombia)
Asociación Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas del Conflicto Armado Interno de Guatemala (Q'anil Tinamit) (Guatemala)
Association of Justice and Rehabilitation (Tunisia)
Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Missing in Lebanon (Lebanon)
Initiative for Vulnerable Persons and Women in Action for Integrated Development (IPVFAD) (Democratic Republic of Congo)
Khulumani (South Africa)
Network of Families of the Disappeared in Nepal (NEFAD) (Nepal)
Proyecto VOS-Voces of Survivors (USA/Argentina)
Relais Prison-Société Association (Morocco)

² *Al Jazeera English*, "[Al Jazeera journalist leaves hospital day after Israeli arrest](#)", 6 June 2021.

³ Netael Bandel, "[Israel Won't Intervene in Sheikh Jarrah Case, Making Eviction of Palestinian Families More Likely](#)", *Ha'aretz*, 7 June 2021.

Ta'afi (Syria)