
'Grave aggression': Israel begins demolition of residential buildings in the West Bank

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Israel has started demolishing 13 residential buildings in East Jerusalem's Wadi Hummus for being too close to the separation barrier, even though the area falls under the Palestinian Authority's administration.

Israel Defense Force soldiers were seen placing explosives in a building set for demolition after they arrived before dawn. Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan said 700 police and 200 soldiers were involved in the operation. They evacuated a family from one of the buildings and removed activists protesting the demolition. Construction vehicles smashed up a number of buildings.

The buildings are set on land that falls within Area A of the West Bank, which is administered by the Palestinian Authority, and the residents got permits from the PA to build there.

However, the High Court ruled in favor of an Israeli Defense Ministry order to demolish 13 buildings because they are too close to the separation barrier, which Israel built around and inside the West Bank. The June decision has sparked fears that it will set a dangerous precedent for other homes in the PA-controlled area.

Israeli forces patrol as a machinery demolishes a Palestinian house at Wadi Hummus July 22, 2019 © Mussa Qawasma / Reuters

"Despite an order from the military commander, the residents there are making their own law, building. There are hundreds of illegal structures," Erdan told Israel's Army Radio, adding that

there is *"no sufficient governance there."*

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh condemned the *"grave aggression,"* and said that a complaint would be made to the International Criminal Court. *"This is a continuation of the forced displacement of the people of Jerusalem from their homes and lands – a war crime and a crime against humanity,"* he said.

Wadi Hummus is on the edge of Sur Baher in southeast Jerusalem, and falls outside the city's municipal borders. When construction of the separation barrier began in 2003, Wadi Hummus was left on the Israeli side of the structure, even though it is part of the West Bank and under PA administration.

[@mikejsmith504](#) Three buildings now being taken down in this part of Sur Baher. The eight-story one in the foreground not being demolished yet, but Israeli soldiers inside and appear to be preparing explosives for it.

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The IDF Central Command issued an injunction banning construction within 250 meters of the wall seven years ago, after many families from Sur Baher had begun building homes in Wadi Hummus with PA authorization. The residents say the order was not publicized, and that the area is the only place where they can expand their village as it is surrounded by the barrier and Israeli neighborhoods. The residents' attorney Haitham Khatib has argued that the 250-meter limit does not apply to other areas in the city.

UN humanitarian coordinator Jamie McGoldrick and other UN officials called on Israel to stop its demolition plans last week, and the EU said the policy *"undermines the viability of the two-state solution and the prospect for a lasting peace."*
