

Amnesty International Charges: War Crimes!

On May 18, while the Israeli military was destroying dozens of houses in the town of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, Amnesty International released a report entitled “Under the Rubble: House Demolition and Destruction of Land And Property,” which charges Israel with class A war crimes. The report condemns Israel’s demolition, in the last three and a half years, of 3,000 Palestinian homes, two homes a day, plus vast areas of Palestinian agricultural land, and called on Israel to halt all unlawful destruction of homes and land, including the expansion of Israeli settlements and the building of the wall in the Occupied Territories. The report also documents how this policy extends to Israel’s Arab citizens, in violation of international conventions of which Israel is a signatory.

The Israeli policy has left tens of thousands of men, women, and children homeless or without a livelihood. The report shows that planning and building policies in Israel are discriminatory, as Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are routinely denied building permits and face the threat of demolition of their homes.

The report shows that Israel’s military/security justification is so broad that almost no Palestinian/Israeli Arab property or plot of land is secure from destruction or seizure. Under the Israeli army’s interpretation of international humanitarian law—given the spread of Israeli settle-

ments, settlers’ roads, and army positions throughout the densely populated Gaza Strip next to Palestinian refugee camps, towns, and villages—virtually every building or stretch of land in the Gaza Strip could potentially be considered a threat and a target for military demolition. According to the United Nations, more than 2,000 homes in Gaza alone have been destroyed in the last three years, and 10% of the agricultural land. In the West Bank, almost 90% of Israel’s wall is being built on occupied territory and at least 600 homes have been destroyed.

In the period 2002-03, in Gaza, there has been an estimated 1,800 acres of agricultural land destroyed, including 226,000 trees. This destruction has included the ripping up of olive, citrus, date, and almond trees (pulled out by the roots, evidently to prevent them growing again), the bulldozing of electricity poles, and the filling in or smashing up of hundreds of wells, water pumps, and containers.

The current operation aims at adding hundreds more houses to the list. World Bank President James Wolfensohn on May 18 also denounced Israel’s mass destruction of Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip. Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting of the World Economic Forum in Jordan, Wolfensohn told the Israeli daily *Ma’ariv*: “Israel’s military operations pertaining to the demolitions of thousands of homes in Rafah are reckless, and leaves tens of thousands of people without a roof over their heads. As a Jew, I am ashamed of this kind of treatment of people.”

The report is available at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGMDE150402004?open&of=ENG-ISR>

—Dean Andromidas