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EUROPEAN UNION

Office of the European Union Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA)

Six-Month Report on Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, (reporting period January-June 2019)

Summary

In the first half of 2019 (January-June) advancement of housing units continued on a high level. 5,800 new housing units were advanced in different stages of the planning and implementation process (tenders and plans) in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. 1,153 of the units pertain to settlements located in East Jerusalem, and 4,647 to settlements located in other parts of the West Bank, including in outlying locations deep inside the West Bank.

Several significant developments took place during the reporting period.

A new settlement was approved by the retroactive authorization of the Haresha outpost in the north of the West Bank. Another plan authorized previously unauthorized settler construction in Sde Bar east of Bethlehem.

Plans were advanced for the settlements Efrat and Ma'ale Adumim, two large settlements in strategic locations that hamper the possibility for a contiguous Palestinian state and North-South, East-West connectivity. 289 new housing units were approved for validation for the expansion of the Alon settlement near the Palestinian community of Khan al-Ahmar, which is under threat of demolition. Khan al-Ahmar is situated in a sensitive location in Area C, and has strategic importance for preserving the contiguity of a future Palestinian state.

Other developments contributing to settlement expansion include the expropriation of Palestinian land for the construction of bypass roads for settlers, settlement activities related to touristic endeavours in and around the Old City of Jerusalem, the eviction of the Palestinian Abu Asab family from its home in the Muslim quarter of Jerusalem's Old City, as well as an increase in the number of reported incidents of settler-related violence.

There are currently approximately 215,000 Israelis living in East Jerusalem while the settler population in Area C of the occupied West Bank is some 413,000.¹ This brings the Israeli settler population in the West Bank to approximately 630,000 individuals in some 143 settlement locations in the West Bank (132) including East Jerusalem (11)², and 113 outposts.

As stated in UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016), the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

¹ Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017.

³ East Talpiyot, French Hill, Gilo, Har Homa, Jewish Quarter, Maalot Dafna, Neve Ya'akov, Pisgat Ze'ev, Ramat Eshkol, Ramat Shlomo and Ramot.

1. SETTLEMENT PLANS AND TENDERS IN 2019 (JANUARY-JUNE)

In the first six months of 2019, 5,800 housing units were advanced in different stages in the planning and implementation process in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.³ Of the 5,800 units, 1,153 units pertain to settlements located in East Jerusalem, and 4,647 units to settlements located in other parts of the West Bank, including in outlying locations deep inside the West Bank.

The expansion of settlements took place in principally two main stages.

The first stage took place on 4 April 2019 when the Higher Planning Council of the Civil Administration forwarded 28 plans for the construction of 3,691 new housing units. 1,226 units were approved for validation (final approval), and at least 2,465 units were approved for deposit.

These plans include 1,000 units in Efrat and 603 units in Ma'ale Adumim, two large settlements in strategic locations that hamper the possibility for a contiguous Palestinian state and North-South, East-West connectivity. Other plans concerned the expansion of the Alon settlement near the Palestinian community of Khan al-Ahmar, which is under threat of demolition. Khan al-Ahmar is situated in a sensitive location in Area C, and has strategic importance for preserving the contiguity of a future Palestinian state. Plans also concerned the construction of a 370-meter-long pedestrian bridge between two parts of the Beitar Illit settlement over private Palestinian land.

Also on 4 April 2019, the Ministry of Housing and the Israel Lands Authority published 13 tenders related to settlements for the construction of 956 housing units and commercial complexes in the West Bank.

The second stage took place on 30 May 2019, when the Ministry of Housing published four tenders for the construction of 805 housing units in Israeli settlements located in East Jerusalem, 460 units in Pisgat Ze'ev and 345 units in Ramot. This year's number of units tendered in East Jerusalem already exceeds the respective numbers over the last four years; 2015 (583), 2016 (323), 2017 (130) and 2018 (603).

These plans are intended to add housing units to already existing settlements in East Jerusalem in a way that increases the density of the built-up areas and does not actually expand the settlements geographically.

³ All the data on settlements are based on publicly available information from the Civil Administration's High Planning Committee, where Peace Now is present at the meetings. For detailed information about the plans see this link: peacenow.org.il

Table 1. Overview of settlement announcements in the first half of 2019 (January-June)

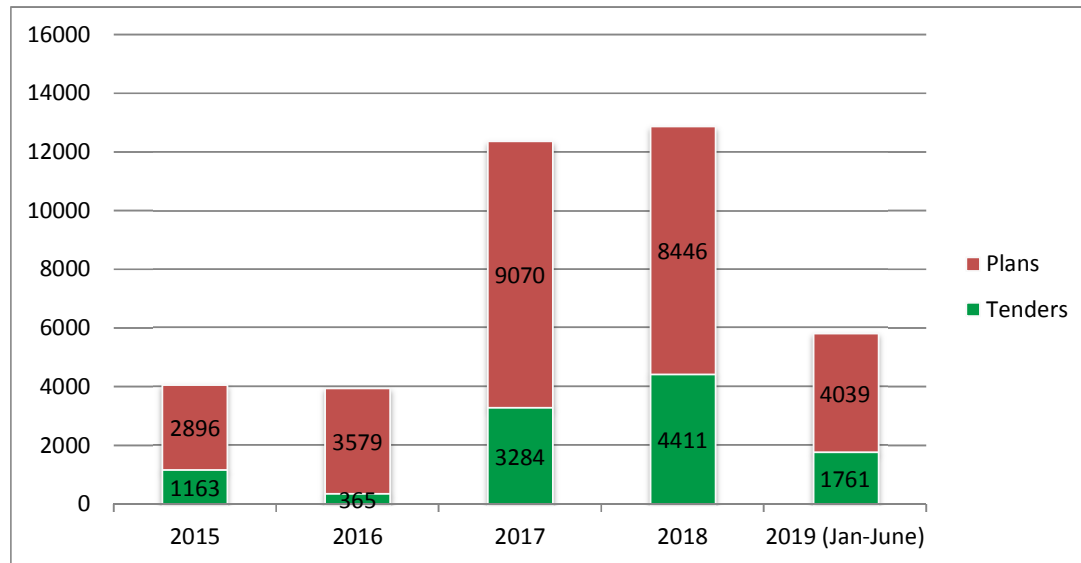
East Jerusalem		Other parts of the West Bank	
18 Feb	Plans for 348 units (Gilo)	4 April	Plans for 118 units (Etz Efrayim)
30 May	Tenders for 263 (Ramot)	4 April	Plans for 25 units (Pduel)
30 May	Tenders for 82 units (Ramot)	4 April	Plans for 7 units (Rehelim)
30 May	Tenders for 210 units (Pisgat Ze'ev)	4 April	Plans for 107 units (Elon Moreh)
30 May	Tenders for 250 units (Pisgat Ze'ev)	4 April	Plans for 152 units (Givat Ze'ev)
		4 April	Plans for 85 units (Karnei Shomron)
		4 April	Plans for 351 units (Elkana)
		4 April	Plans for 12 units (Ariel)
		4 April	Plans for 147 units (Mitzpe Yerico)
		4 April	Plans for 258 units (Haresha Talmon)
		4 April	Plans for 220 units (Shilo)
		4 April	Plans for 289 units (Alon)
		4 April	Plans for 54 units (Oranit)
		4 April	Plans for 32 units (Beit Arie)
		4 April	Plans for 202 units (Beitar Illit)
		4 April	Plans for 1,000 units (Efrat)
		4 April	Plans for 29 units (Sde Bar Nokdim)
		4 April	Plans for 603 units (Ma'ale Adumim)
		4 April	Tenders for 111 units (Oranit)
		4 April	Tenders for 118 units (Ofraim)
		4 April	Tenders for 112 units (Alfei Menashe)
		4 April	Tenders for 250 units (Elkana)
		4 April	Tenders for 195 units (Ariel)
		4 April	Tenders for 14 units (Beitar Illit)
		4 April	Tenders for 62 units (Geva Binyamin)
		4 April	Tenders for 44 units (Ma'ale Efraim)
		4 April	Tenders for 50 units (Immanuel)
Total	1,153 units	Total	4,647 units

Source: Peace Now and Ir Amim

2. TRENDS IN SETTLEMENT PLANS AND TENDERS SINCE 2015

The total number of housing units advanced through plans and tenders during the first six months of 2019 (5,800) is roughly in line with the higher levels of settlement advancement seen since 2017, when settlement advancement increased more than three-fold compared to 2015 and 2016 (see table 2).

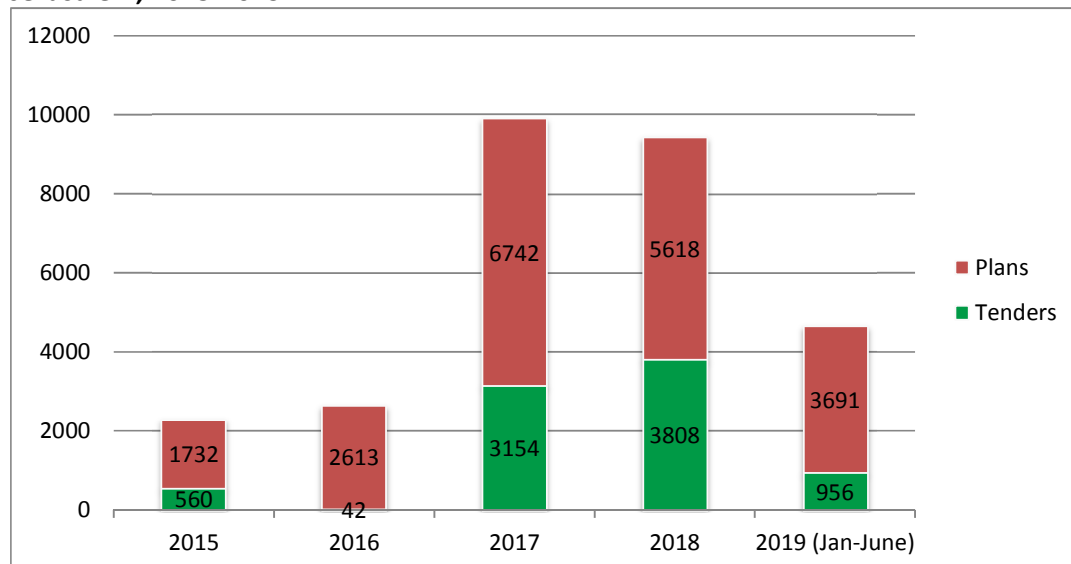
Table 2. Advancement of settlement units in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 2015-2019



Source: Peace Now and Ir Amim (Previous EU Settlement reports have included, extraordinarily, the advancement of 2,992 units in Gilo South in 2018, which were discussed at local committee. In this table, those advancements have been excluded).

As illustrated in table 3, the West Bank (here not including East Jerusalem) experienced a significant up-tick in the advancement of plans and tenders in 2017.

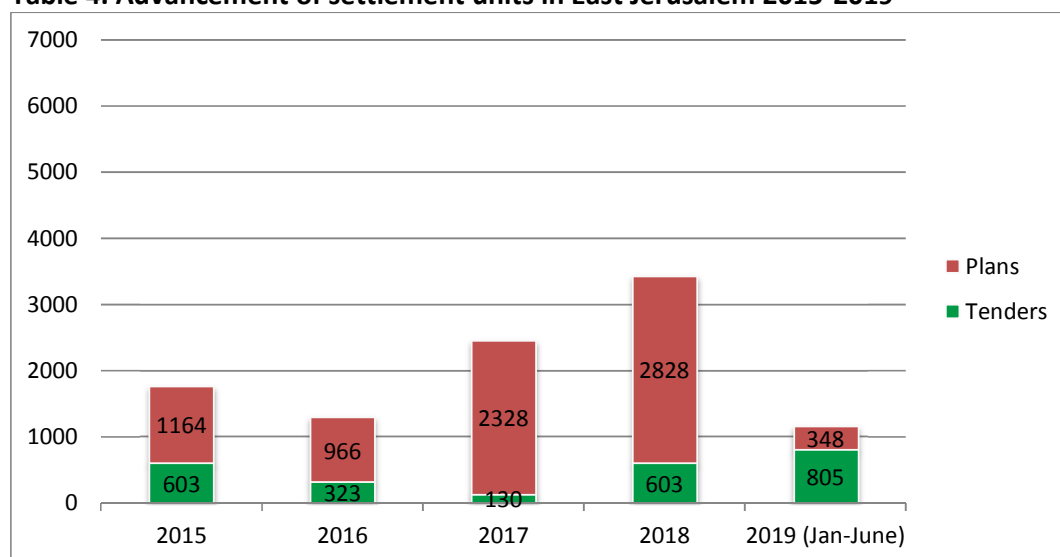
Table 3. Advancement of settlement units in the West Bank, here not including East Jerusalem, 2015-2019



Source: Peace Now

As illustrated in table 4, settlements advancements in East Jerusalem increased in 2017 and 2018, respectively. 2019 has so far seen somewhat lower levels of advancements compared with the two preceding years.

Table 4. Advancement of settlement units in East Jerusalem 2015-2019



Source: Ir Amim (Previous EU Settlement reports have included, extraordinarily, the advancement of 2,992 units in Gilo South in 2018, which were discussed at local committee. In this table, those advancements have been excluded).

3. TRENDS IN ACTUAL CONSTRUCTION

The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics has not yet published data for 2019. Furthermore, Peace Now will not publish information about actual construction in 2019 until early 2020.

4. DEVELOPMENTS CONTRIBUTING TO SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

The following developments are seen as contributing to settlement expansion and the consolidation of Israel's presence and control of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The construction of bypass roads for settlers

In January, the northern part of the Eastern Ring Road (route 4370) opened to traffic. The road connects the settlement of Giva Binyamin to route 1, the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway, and thus facilitates movement for settlers to Jerusalem. The road has been referred to as the "Apartheid Road" by critics, as it is split in the middle along its entire length by a wall separating Palestinian and Israeli traffic.

In May, the Israeli Civil Administration approved construction of two bypass roads; the Huwwara bypass road south of Nablus, and the Al-Aroub bypass road south of Bethlehem. In early April, the Israeli Defence Minister (at that time Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu), approved the construction of the two bypass roads to begin. Later, the head of the Civil Administration issued orders to confiscate hundreds of dunams of private Palestinian land to construct the roads. Once completed, the bypass roads will likely lead to further development and construction in the adjacent settlements.

For the purpose of the Huwwara bypass road (five and a half kilometres), an expropriation order was issued for 406 dunams of Palestinian land from the villages of Burin, Huwarra, Beita, Awarta, Yasuf, Yatma and A-Sawiya. The road is expected to serve settlers in the four settlements of Yitzhar, Itamar, Har Bracha and Alon Moreh, where some 7,100 settlers live. The road could also facilitate travel to the nearby outpost of Havat Gilad.

For the purpose of the planned Al-Aroub bypass road (seven kilometres), an expropriation order was issued for 401 dunams of Palestinian land from the villages of Beit Ummar and Halhul.

Touristic settlement expansion

The reporting period has seen a number of settlement activities related to touristic endeavours in and around the Old City of Jerusalem, in particular in the areas of Gei Ben Hinnom/Wadi Rababe and Silwan.⁴ These activities and projects threaten to further blur the pre-1967 Green Line and are implemented around the vicinity of the planned cable car, which will together create a more seamless link between West Jerusalem and Silwan, and may divert tourist traffic from its traditional routes via Jaffa and Damascus Gates.

Ir Amim has reported that touristic settlement sites – in concert with settler-initiated evictions of Palestinians, takeovers of Palestinian homes, and the expansion of settler compounds – create a "settlement ring" of tightening Israeli control around the Old City. The organization writes that "ultimately, this use of national parks and tourist sites serves the goal of transforming the Palestinian neighborhoods in and around the Old City – including Silwan, At-Tur, Ras al-Amud and Sheikh Jarrah – from a densely populated Palestinian area into one sprawling tourist site that bolsters Israeli control of the area and access to it."

Authorization of outposts

Two of the plans advanced in the reporting period concerned the authorization of outposts. One plan concerned the approval of a new settlement by the retroactive authorization of the Haresha outpost. Another plan retroactively authorized construction in Sde Bar east of Bethlehem. Sde Bar was established as an outpost and was retroactively authorized as an educational institute, but in recent years a new residential neighbourhood was built there without authorization.

The so-called Regularization Law, approved by the Israeli Knesset in February 2017, with the aim of retroactively authorizing the status of Israeli homes built on Palestinian private land, remains frozen pending a decision by the Israeli Supreme Court.

Evictions

On 17 February, the Palestinian Abu Asab family, consisting of seven members including children, was evicted by Israeli authorities from its home in the Aqbat al-Khalidiya neighbourhood in the Muslim quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. The Jewish trust of Tsibora and Marzel initiated an eviction lawsuit against the Abu Asab family, claiming that they have no rights over the property as protected tenants or as 'derived tenants,' and that even if they did, they have breached their protected tenancy agreement as a result of not paying rent. On 24 December 2017, the Israeli Magistrates' Court issued a decision in favour of the Jewish trust's claims over the property and ordered the eviction of the Abu Asab family by no later than 1 March 2018.

⁴ While a small section of Gei Ben Hinnom/Wadi Rababe is situated in West Jerusalem, the remaining part is located in East Jerusalem adjacent to Abu Tur and Silwan.

OCHA estimates that some 199 Palestinian households in East Jerusalem have eviction cases against them, most of which were initiated by settler organisations, placing some 877 people, including 391 children, at risk of displacement. Since 2016, eight families comprising 43 people, including 19 children, have been evicted from their homes, in Beit Hanina, Silwan, the Old City and Sheikh Jarrah.

Settler-related violence

UN OCHA has reported 461 incidents of settler-related violence in the reporting period, which represents an increase of 34 per cent compared with the same period in 2018 (344 incidents), and an increase of 66 per cent compared with the same period in 2017 (278 incidents).⁵

137 of the reported incidents in the reporting period took place in Jerusalem's Old City, and 64 in Hebron. 45 of the reported incidents resulted in casualty, 142 in property damage, and 9 in casualty and property damage. A total of 4,439 trees and 208 vehicles were damaged by settlers in the reporting period according to UN OCHA.

Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) closes down in Hebron

On 28 January 2019, Israel declined to renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), an international observer mission established pursuant to the provisions of the 1995 Interim Agreement (Oslo II Accord) between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). As the mission thereby lacked a mandate to perform its duties, the five contributing states of Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey, closed down the mission. TIPH provided observation and protective presence in the area of the city called H2, which, as per the Hebron Protocol of 1997, is under Israel's direct military control, and where some 40,000 Palestinians and 800 settlers live.

UN OCHA reported that the "departure of over 60 TIPH internationals, increases the risk of heightened tension in H2 and exacerbates the protection risks, including those resulted from human rights violations, facing Palestinian residents, particularly schoolchildren." The settlements in Hebron are located in a dense Palestinian urban area. Israeli security forces impose a number of restrictive measures – including limits on Palestinian vehicular and pedestrian movement – which impede Palestinians' access to educational and health-care institutions, and abilities to conduct commercial affairs. Many Palestinian shops, as well as the city's main vegetable and wholesale markets, which are located in closed areas, have been shut down and thousands of Palestinians have been compelled to move out of their homes.

5. EU PUBLIC STATEMENTS DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

The EU issued the following statements related to settlement expansion during the reporting period.

- In a local statement on 25 February 2019, the EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah condemned the eviction of the Abu Asab family from their home in the Old City of Jerusalem on 17 February. The statement addressed further settlement plans including evictions that are being forwarded in East Jerusalem, mainly in Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, the Old City and Beit Safafa.

⁵ Data available at <https://www.ochaopt.org/page/settler-related-violence>.

- On 11 April 2019, the EU Spokesperson issued a statement on a settlement announcement by Israeli authorities. The statement addressed promoted plans for more than 4,600 new housing units for settlers in the occupied West Bank, including the legalisation of an illegal outpost.
- In a local statement on 26 April 2019, the EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah noted with grave concern the demolition by Israeli authorities of Palestinian property in the Wadi Yasul area of the Silwan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem on 17 April 2019.
- On 1 June 2019, the EU Spokesperson issued a statement on tenders for settlement construction published by Israel. The statement addressed the publication by the Israeli authorities of tenders for over 800 settlement units in the settlements of Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev.