

AN AUGUST OF DESTRUCTION

Israel has demolished the homes of 228 people

In August, Israeli authorities demolished structures in 29 Palestinian villages and communities in Area C of the West Bank, leaving 228 people, 124 of them minors, homeless in the sweltering heat of one of the hottest months on record. Many of the demolitions were carried out in small shepherding and farming communities where residents are constantly subject to threats and ongoing Israeli attempts to drive them from their homes and force them from Area C.

The demolitions were ordered on the pretext of "illegal construction" – a disingenuous argument since Palestinians are denied the possibility to construct their homes legally. Demolitions play a key role in Israel's overall policy toward Area C, which is based on long-term intentions to hold on to the area for good by exploiting local resources and building and expanding settlements, while forcing out and expelling Palestinian residents.

This government policy, which has been systematically implemented for years, constitutes the forcible transfer of protected persons inside an occupied territory, be it directly – through the demolition of their homes – or indirectly, by creating an intolerable reality.



50 Structures demolished

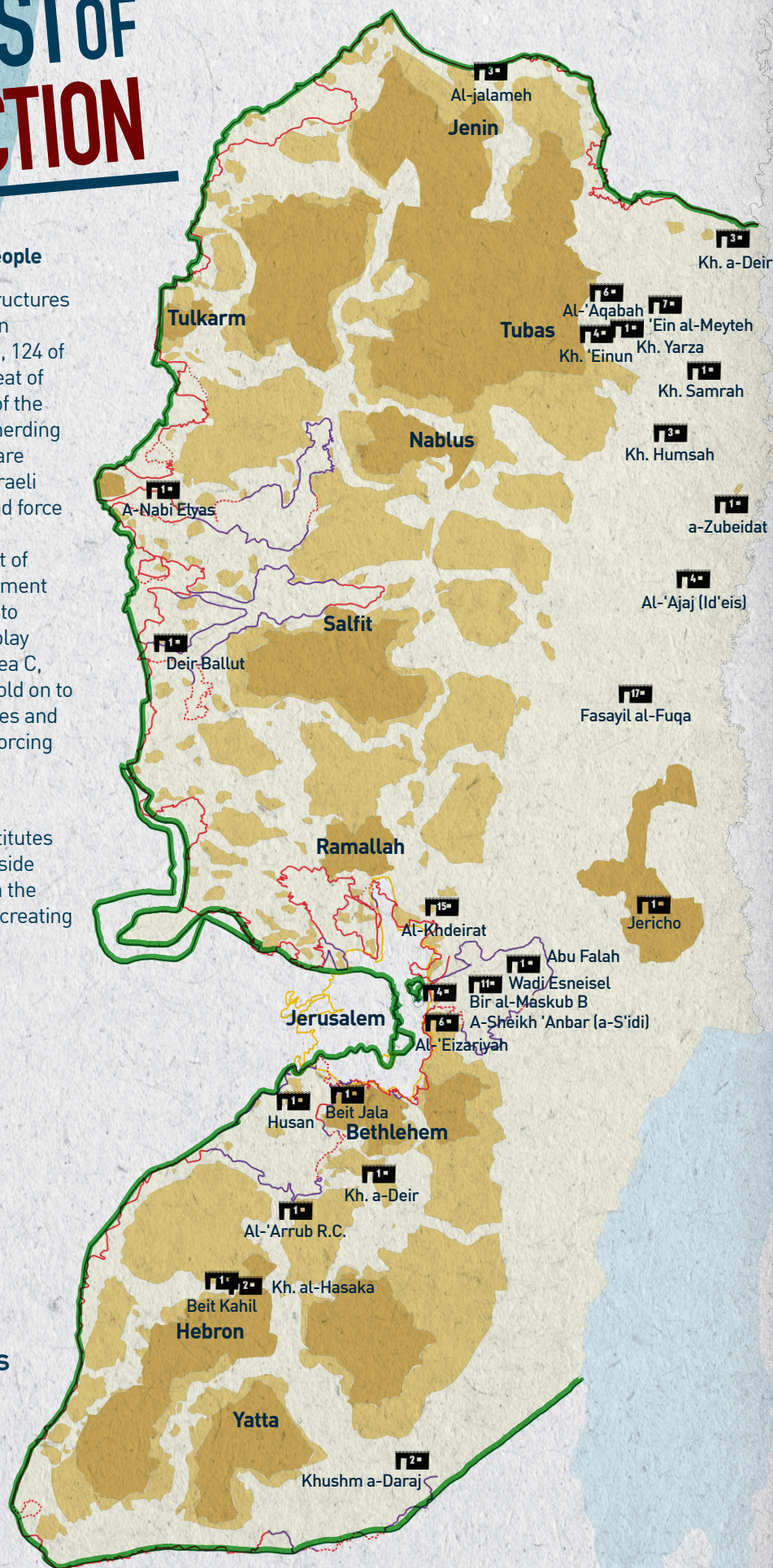
29 Palestinian villages



228 people made homeless

124 of them minors

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Khadijeh Bsharat and her daughters on the ruins of their home. Photo: 'Aref Daraghmeh, B'Tselem, 27 August 2015

To the thousands of Palestinians living in dozens of farming and shepherding communities in Area C, most of which are hooked up to neither water nor power grids, the humble tents and shacks that were destroyed were home, and the livestock pens vital to their livelihood.

Khadijeh Bsharat, a 27-year-old married mother of two who lives in Khirbet Humsah in the Jordan Valley, told B'Tselem field researcher 'Aref Daraghmeh how the Israeli authorities demolished her family's home on 11 August 2015:

We live in a single-room mud hut with a ceiling made of plastic sheeting and tin. In the winter, our house turns into a pool and all our belongings get flooded. When that happens, we have no shelter. My husband and I decided to build a house next to our mud hut, which was practically falling apart. With difficulty, my husband managed to borrow some money, and we managed to build a structure from cinder blocks and tin with very little money. We were hoping to finish construction and move into the new place.

We make a living farming and shepherding, but our situation gets worse day by day. The military won't let us take our livestock through the pastures in the area. I finished a degree in art at the university and I was hoping to find a job to help bring in some more money to give my daughters a better life, but everything went wrong. On the morning of the demolition, I was on my way to a job interview in Jericho. At 9:30, my husband phoned to tell me that Civil Administration and military bulldozers were demolishing everything we'd built and there was nothing left. I just froze where I was and began crying. I couldn't stop. I couldn't think about anything else. I didn't care about the job interview anymore and I went home.

When I got there, I saw my daughters sitting by the rubble, and my husband just standing there, confused and at a loss. The whole family just looked at the wreckage, heartbroken. I felt as if my whole world had fallen to pieces and that I was living a nightmare. Instead of having our lives advance and move a step forward, we slid several steps back. I had hoped to free ourselves of that room that was set to topple right on top of me and my daughters, and where snakes and scorpions constantly come in. I had hoped to live a more normal life, like other people. Now every morning when I wake up, I see the ruins and my heart breaks.