

**Commission of the Churches on International Affairs  
World Council of Churches**

UN Human Rights Council 18th Session

**Item 7: Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories**

General Debate

26 September 2011

To be delivered by Anne-Marie Vuignier-James

Thank you, Ms. President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs would like to express its concern about the increasing large-scale evictions and demolitions in the area covering more than 60 per cent of the West Bank and controlled by Israel, known as Area C.

Area C never came under Israeli sovereignty, and was meant to be gradually transferred to Palestinian administration. But the Israeli authorities have consolidated Israel's grip on it. Most of the area has been reserved for military training or settlement expansion. Around 300,000 settlers currently live in illegal settlements in Area C versus around 150'000 Palestinians. The military authorities impose severe restrictions on Palestinian constructions and less than 1 percent of the zone is available for Palestinian development. This makes it almost impossible for Palestinians living there to obtain building permits. Many are forced to build in defiance of military orders and face having their homes demolished.

In 2011, until September 20th, the Israeli authorities demolished 408 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C, making 804 people homeless, more than doubling its already bad record of 2010 (source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

As well as homes, the army demolished dozens of animal shelters and 20 rainwater collection facilities. Over 3,000 outstanding demolition orders include 18 targeting schools. In September, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported that the Israeli authorities are planning to forcefully evict Bedouin in the West Bank from Area C. Around 27,000 Bedouin live in Area C and the Jerusalem periphery and stand to be affected.

The sharp increase in West Bank demolitions in 2011 shows that there is a conscious Israeli government policy to remove Palestinians from the area.

*A de facto* Israeli takeover of Area C will have profound implications for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It threatens the Palestinian Authority's state building project and makes a viable Palestinian state hard to envisage.

Under the Geneva Conventions, Israel has a duty to protect Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories, to respect their right to a decent standard of living and is not allowed to transfer its own population to those territories.

Therefore, Ms. President, we call:

1. The Government of Israel
  - a. to immediately stop demolishing Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and rescind all demolition orders against Palestinian-owned structures, a policy which violates article 53 of the 4th Geneva Convention,
  - b. to immediately cease confiscating Palestinian land in Area C for settlement construction
  - c. to implement a fair and equitable system of water distribution that provides for the needs of Palestinian communities in Area C.
2. The Human Rights Council and the international community to take firm steps to ensure that the Government of Israel refrains from demolitions and evictions, in particular in occupied Area C, and for donors to hold the Government of Israel financially accountable for demolition of projects they have funded.
3. We also call on policy makers and international donors to support projects that promote continued Palestinian life in Area C.