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Israel's West Bank operation fuels mass displacement of Palestinians

The Israeli military has displaced tens of thousands of Palestinians by destroying homes and essential civilian infrastructure in Jenin and Tulkarem refugee camps rendering them uninhabitable, as part of its ongoing brutal military operation in the occupied West Bank, said Amnesty International.

On 5 June, Palestinians mark Naksa Day, commemorating the forced displacement of approximately 300,000 Palestinians during the June 1967 war, when Israel occupied the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Fifty-eight years on, Israel's military operation over the past four months has led to the largest displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank since then.

The Israeli army has deployed tanks, carried out air strikes, destroyed buildings, dug up roads and infrastructure, and imposed extensive restrictions on freedom of movement through checkpoints and roadblocks. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, between 21 January and 4 June, the Israeli forces have killed at least 80 Palestinians, including 14 children, in the northern West Bank, including Nablus.

"Israel's deadly military operation in the occupied West Bank, unfolding in the horrific shadow of its ongoing genocide in the occupied Gaza Strip, has had catastrophic consequences for tens of thousands of displaced Palestinians who are facing a rapidly escalating crisis with no foreseeable prospects of return. Unlawful transfer of protected persons is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a war crime," said Erika Guevara Rosas, Amnesty International's Senior Director for Research, Advocacy, Policy and Campaigns.

"Israel must immediately halt illegal practices leading to the forced displacement of Palestinians, including attacks on residential areas,

destruction of property and infrastructure, pervasive access and movement restrictions imposed on Palestinians. Some of these measures amount to collective punishment, which is also prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention.

“These actions are part of a wider pattern of unlawful Israeli policies and practices to dispossess, dominate and oppress Palestinians in the West Bank under Israel’s ruthless system of apartheid.”

Members of popular committees of Jenin, Nur Shams and Tulkarem refugee camps told Amnesty International an estimated 40,000 residents have been displaced- half of whom are from Jenin refugee camp.

Video footage verified by Amnesty International provides evidence of wide-scale home demolitions and damage to civilian property and infrastructure in the camps. Arrests have also soared, with the Palestinian Commission of Detainees reporting approximately 1,000 Palestinians arrested in Jenin (700) and Tulkarem (300) since the operation began.

The Israeli military has declared Jenin, Nur Shams and Tulkarem refugee camps closed military areas, with forces stationed there, actively preventing residents from accessing their homes or what’s left of them. Witnesses said that Israeli forces shoot at civilians who attempt to go back even just to check on their properties or collect belongings.

In a stark example, on 21 May, a diplomatic delegation of representatives from over 20 countries, including the UK, France, Canada, China and Russia, came under fire from Israeli soldiers while visiting Jenin refugee camp.

‘Most destructive’ operation in decades

Israel’s military operation started in Jenin Refugee Camp on 21 January, and expanded to Tulkarem refugee camps on 27 January, and subsequently to Tammoun town and Al-Far’ah refugee camp. While Israeli forces withdrew from Al-Far’ah on 12 February, they continue to be stationed in Jenin and Tulkarem.

In an alarming development on 23 February Israeli tanks were deployed to Jenin for the first time in more than 20 years. On the same day Israel’s Defense Minister instructed the army to “prepare for a long stay in the camps that were cleared” and to prevent residents from returning. Israeli media, citing military sources, have reported that the operation is expected to last for months with hundreds of soldiers remaining in the camps for “monitoring”.

On 22 March 2025, UNRWA had already described the operation as “by far the longest and most destructive operation in the occupied West Bank since the second intifada in the 2000’s.”

Home demolitions and destruction of infrastructure

The Israeli military has relentlessly destroyed hundreds of homes in these camps and adjacent neighborhoods during military operations or with demolition orders. The Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) reports that in the Jenin refugee camp alone, the Israeli army fully destroyed hundreds of homes, and damaged many more rendering them uninhabitable. In March, Israel announced plans to demolish 66 homes in Jenin camp. More recently, on 1 May, the Israeli army issued further demolition orders for 106 homes in Tulkarem refugee camps – 60 in Nur Shams and 48 in Tulkarem camp.

Amnesty International's Crisis Evidence Lab verified 25 videos shared on social media by residents or soldiers showing destruction of civilian property by Israeli forces in Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nur Shams refugee camps between 31 January and 1 June 2025. The footage shows numerous structures demolished with manually laid explosives, roads, buildings and cars destroyed with bulldozers and the aftermath of the destruction with civilian property reduced entirely to rubble. In many cases, Israeli forces appear to have conducted clearing operations, removing buildings to widen or create new roads.

Amnesty International also analysed 32 additional videos and photographs provided directly by Palestinians residents, which document damage to homes and personal property. The images show destroyed interiors, including shattered windows, broken furniture, damaged doors, ransacked closets, scattered personal belongings, and leftover food strewn across rooms.

"The level of destruction in the camps is so massive that it will take months before they are inhabitable again," said Nihad Shaweesh of the Nur Shams popular committee. "If they let us return, even those whose homes haven't been entirely destroyed will need months to rehabilitate these homes, due to the heavy destruction and damage to the structures."

A mother of six from Jenin Refugee Camp, whose name has been withheld for security reasons, described how she received photos on her phone showing her home being completely destroyed. She said: "I opened the photos and immediately recognized my children's bed sheets. I couldn't believe that was my house in the photos. They demolished the house and wrecked our SUV. Our car was nothing but a mass of metal. I was in shock. I couldn't speak and only kept crying."

A resident of Nur Shams, Ibraheem Khalifa, described how his family was forcibly displaced on 9 February and the subsequent demolition of their apartment building:

“We arrived ... to witness the demolitions of our neighbours’ homes and to be present with them [in solidarity]. However, while sitting there, we realized that the [military] bulldozer started to demolish our homes as well. These are apartments we built with our own hands. There, we grew up and made memories. In this house, we got married, held celebrations, went through sorrows—everything. This house witnessed it all. Now, our homes and all of our belongings in them are gone.”

As part of the operation Israeli forces have also systematically destroyed critical infrastructure, including roads, water, electricity, and communications networks. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) confirmed the widespread destruction of roads and streets within the refugee camps.

Militarization of camps and restrictions on freedom of movement

Access to the refugee camps for residents and freedom of movement have also been severely curtailed with Israeli forces blocking entrances and main roads with metal gates or checkpoints and using military bulldozers to create dirt barriers and barbed-wire fences.

One resident of Nur Shams, Fatima Ali, described how on 9 February, Israeli forces took over her home and converted it to a military outpost. She said they raided her home, forcing her brother’s family to leave while she, being ill and unable to walk due to destroyed streets, was confined to one room as her house was turned into a temporary military outpost:

“You can see all directions from my house, I have a balcony and a door to the West and another to the North, so they [soldiers] came and occupied it. At first, they kept me inside, locked in one room. When they arrested someone, they brought him to my house. They told me to leave hours later, and I needed the emergency services to help me leave the camp because all the streets were dug up and destroyed.”

The military operation has also infringed on other social and economic rights including the right to education with many children missing weeks of school. In Tulkarem, more than 691 businesses have been destroyed, damaged and remain shut down.

“Tulkarem became a ghost town. Businesses in the city close at 6pm because there are no visitors or customers coming from outside. Tulkarem farmers cannot reach their agricultural lands and workers cannot leave due to the closure of checkpoints. The economic situation in the city is catastrophic,” said Qais Awad of the Tulkarem Chamber of Commerce.

Urgent need for international action

"The international community's persistent failure to hold Israel accountable for its violations against Palestinians, in particular for its cruel system of apartheid and unlawful occupation has emboldened Israel and fueled further egregious violations of Palestinians' rights," said Erika Guevara Rosas.

"The International Court of Justice's July 2024 advisory opinion made it crystal clear: Israel's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful and must rapidly come to an end. States must replace statements with concrete action. They must immediately stop providing arms and military assistance to Israel and halt any business activities that risk contributing to its serious violations of international law. They also must support and cooperate fully with the International Criminal Court in its investigation and prosecution of crimes under international law in Palestine.

"Failure to take these measures will only help Israel to entrench its system of apartheid against Palestinians and its unlawful occupation."

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