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HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“All My Dreams Have Been Erased”

Israel’s Forced Displacement of Palestinians in the
West Bank



“All My Dreams Have Been Erased”

Israel’s Forced Displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank

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“All My Dreams Have Been Erased”

Israel’s Forced Displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank

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Summary

The [Israeli] soldiers came and told us to leave. No one told us where to go, just to get out of the camp. My fear is that what happened in 1948 will happen to us here. I have an inner belief that we won't be able to come back ever.

– Nadim M., displaced from Tulkarem refugee camp, March 26, 2025

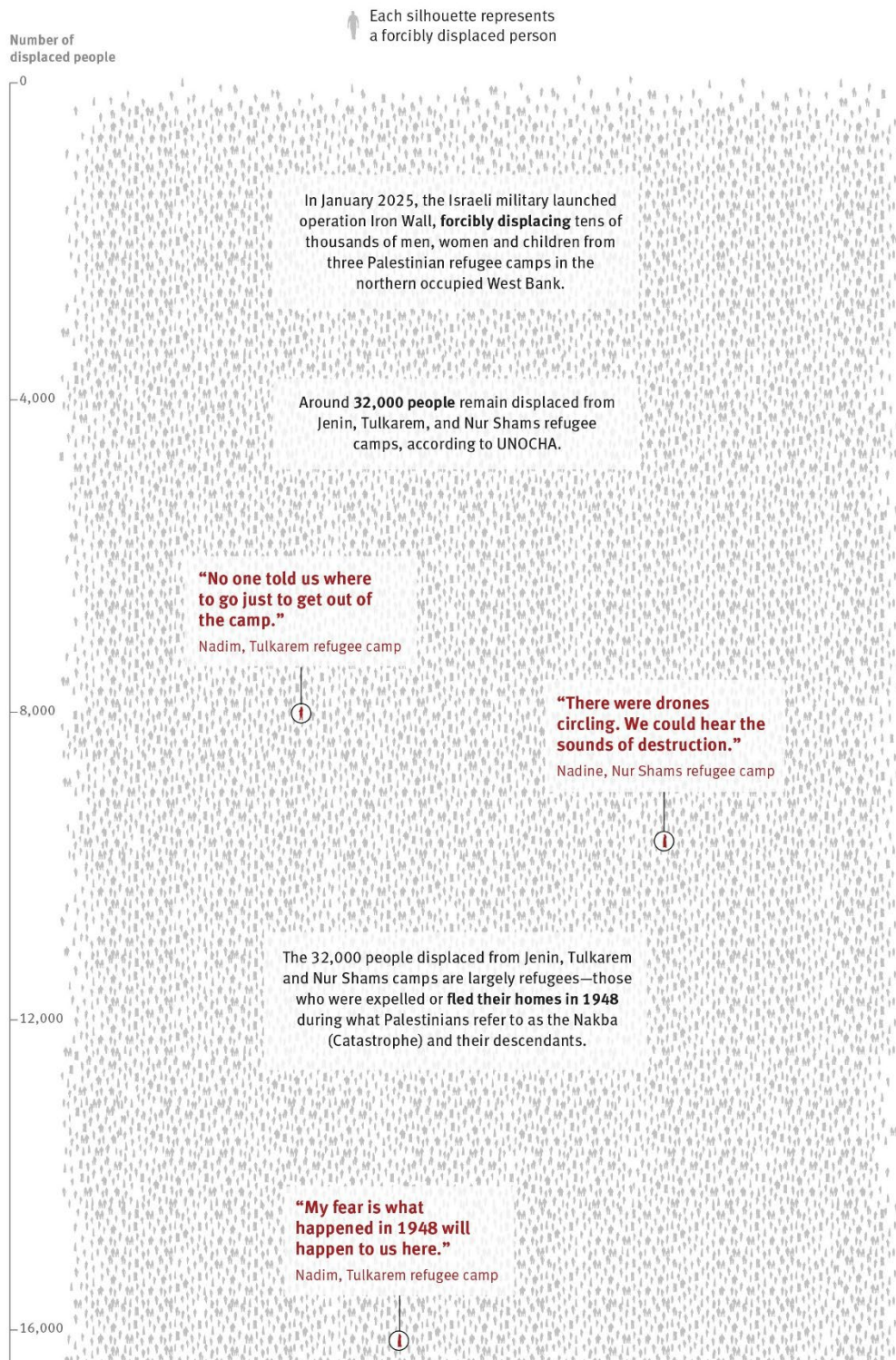
Nadim M., a pseudonym for a 60-year-old father of four, was forced to flee Tulkarem refugee camp in the West Bank of the Occupied Palestinian Territory in January 2025 when Israeli military forces raided the camp and stormed his home. He told Human Rights Watch that Israeli soldiers restrained him with zip ties, searched his property, and then ordered him and his family to leave, warning them that if they turned to go to the left or to the right they would be targeted by Israeli snipers who were deployed in high places nearby. With no clear destination and no information about available shelters or humanitarian assistance, Nadim M. and his family found refuge in a local mosque that had opened its doors to displaced residents from the camp.

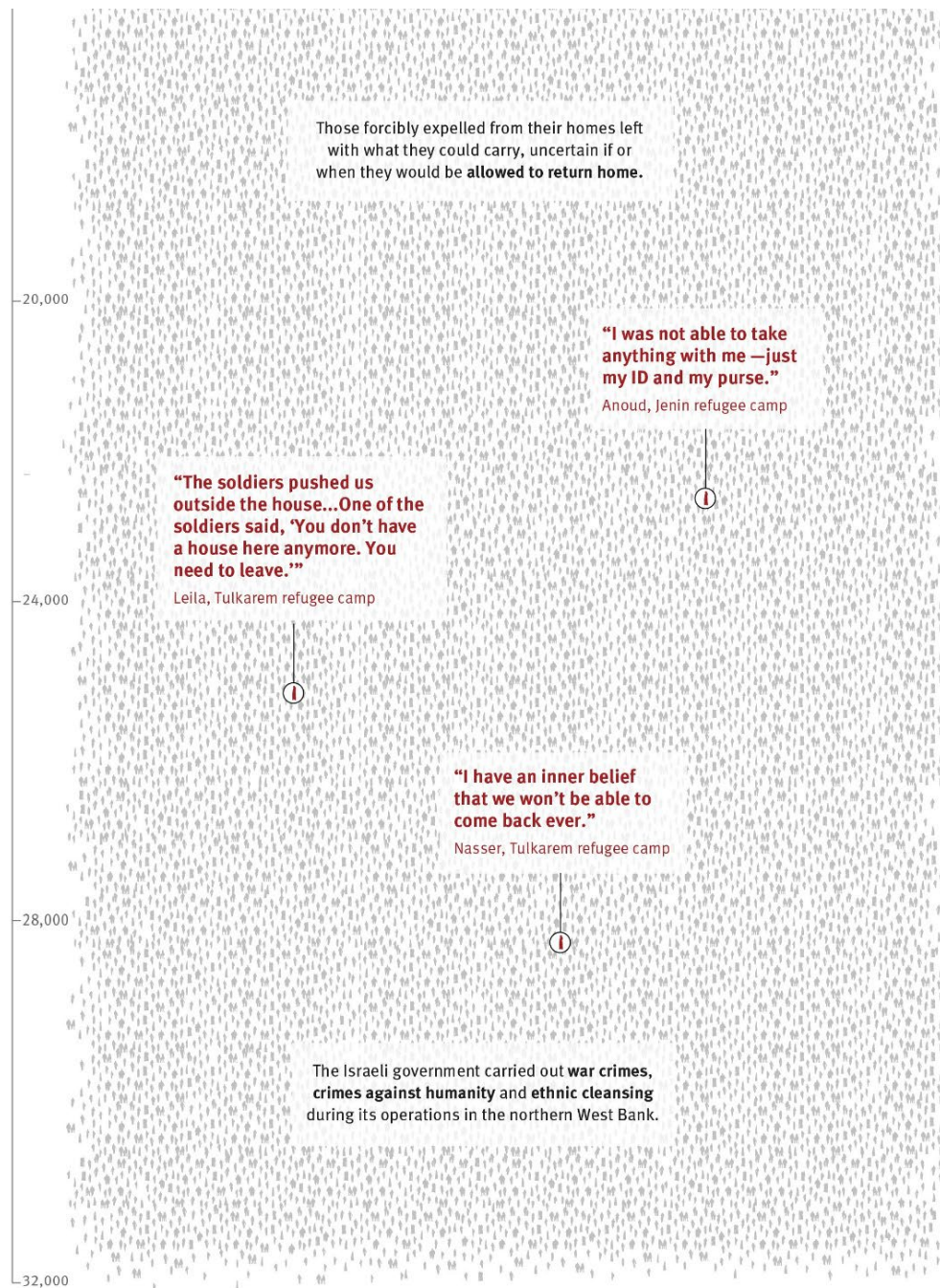
On January 21, just two days after a temporary ceasefire was announced between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza, the Israeli military launched “Operation Iron Wall,” a large-scale operation in the West Bank that also involved Shin Bet, Israel’s security agency, and Border Police. Senior officials claimed the operation targeted militants in refugee camps in the northern West Bank governorates of Jenin and Tulkarem.

The operation emptied the camps in Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams of virtually all its residents, making it the largest displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank in one operation since the 1967 war. Ten months later, the camps remain empty with approximately 32,000 residents displaced. Since then, the Israeli military has demolished 850 homes and other buildings across all three camps. Nadim M. and his family have not returned to their home and have been struggling to live elsewhere in the West Bank.

People Forcibly Displaced From the West Bank Refugee Camps of
Tulkarem, Nur Shams and Jenin

As of August 31, 2025





Source: West Bank Monthly Snapshot Casualties, Property Damage and Displacement, August 2025, OCHA.
Graphic © 2025 Human Rights Watch.

This report examines the Israeli government's conduct of Operation Iron Wall from its start in January 2025 through July 2025, and the resulting mass displacement of Palestinians from three refugee camps in the northern West Bank. Human Rights Watch found that Israeli forces committed forcible displacement in violation of the law of occupation under international humanitarian law that amount to war crimes. Human Rights Watch also found that Israeli forces committed the forcible transfer of population and other inhumane acts as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population, which are crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Israel's actions also violated international human rights law, which remains in effect in the West Bank.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), in its Advisory Opinion of October 22, 2025 on the obligations of Israel in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, stated that the court “cannot fail to observe that Israel’s conduct in the Occupied Palestinian Territory raises serious concerns in light of its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law ... Thus, the Court reaffirms that Israel remains bound by these obligations and is required to comply with them.”¹

Human Rights Watch between March and August 2025 interviewed in person and by phone 31 displaced Palestinians from the Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams refugee camps, and analyzed and verified open-source information and satellite imagery.

In the months prior to Operation Iron Wall, low-level clashes took place between Israeli security forces and Palestinian fighters in Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams refugee camps. There were also small-scale clashes in the immediate days leading up to and during the operation in each of the three refugee camps.

On January 21, Israeli forces carried out a massive raid on Jenin refugee camp, deploying Apache attack helicopters, drones, bulldozers, and armored vehicles to support hundreds of ground troops. Israeli soldiers forced residents from their homes amid active military operations. Residents who spoke to Human Rights Watch said they saw bulldozers

¹ International Court of Justice (ICJ), Advisory Opinions, “Obligations of Israel in relation to the Presence and Activities of the United Nations, Other International Organizations and Third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” October 22, 2025, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/196/196-20251022-adv-01-00-en.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2025), para. 162.

demolishing roads and buildings as they were being expelled. Similar operations took place in Tulkarem refugee camp on January 27 and in nearby Nur Shams camp on February 9, following the same pattern of displacement and destruction.

Witnesses said soldiers moved systematically through the camps, storming homes, ransacking properties, interrogating residents, and eventually forcing families out. One woman from Nur Shams said that she, her husband, and their 14-year-old daughter waited in terror inside their home and watched as Israeli soldiers used heavy machinery to destroy their garden wall, before ordering the family to leave their home and exit the camp. During the raid of Nur Shams camp on February 9, Israeli forces detonated an explosive device at the entrance of a family home, blasting the door open and killing 21-year-old Rahaf al-Ashqar and injuring her father.



Two people with disabilities, including an older man, are assisted by two other men during the forced displacement by Israeli forces from Tulkarem refugee camp in the northern West Bank on January 28, 2025. © 2025 Issam Rimawi/Anadolu via Getty Images

Under article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, Israel, as the occupying power in the West Bank, is prohibited from displacing the population it is obliged to protect except temporarily in exceptional circumstances – namely, when evacuation is required for imperative military reasons or to ensure the safety of the civilian population. Even if one or both conditions are met, international humanitarian law strictly regulates how such evacuations must be carried out. The warring party must evacuate people safely, give them access to food, water, and proper accommodation, and allow them to return once the hostilities in that area have ended.

Displacements that do not meet these conditions are violations of international law and, if committed with criminal intent, are war crimes. When forced displacement is committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population, thus reflecting state or organizational policy, it can constitute a crime against humanity. These actions may also be considered “ethnic cleansing,” a non-legal term used to describe a policy to remove an ethnic or religious group from particular areas “by violent and terror-inspiring means.”

In all three camp raids, the Israeli military failed to take meaningful steps to ensure the safe and dignified evacuation of civilians. Instead, they issued abrupt orders to leave – either given by soldiers on the ground or broadcast via loudspeakers mounted on drones.

All the residents who spoke to Human Rights Watch described the humiliation and fear of being forcibly removed from their homes, unable to gather their belongings and uncertain if or when they would be allowed to return. In one case, Israeli soldiers in Tulkarem refugee camp prevented a man who uses a wheelchair from taking his more functional electric wheelchair. In the brief minutes people were given to leave, some residents said they only managed to take their immediate belongings or just the clothes on their back.

The Israeli military failed to provide camp residents with timely, consistent, or clear instructions on how to safely evacuate. In Jenin refugee camp, Israeli soldiers or orders delivered through drones told residents to exit through one point – the nearby Awdeh roundabout – where the military set up a makeshift checkpoint. In Tulkarem and Nur Shams camps, no designated exit routes were provided; instead, residents received varying instructions based on their location within the camps. Residents described fleeing under the watch of heavily armed soldiers, drones flying overhead apparently tracking their movements, and witnessing the widespread destruction of their homes while they fled.

Human Rights Watch found that during the repeated – and unlawful – displacement of Palestinians from their homes and places of refuge in Gaza since October 2023, Israeli authorities created a complex evacuation system and the designation of so-called “safe zones” for civilians. Despite these measures, Israeli forces unnecessarily put displaced people in harm’s way, which amounted to the war crime of forced displacement and crimes against humanity. By comparison, the Israeli forces that emptied the three West Bank refugee camps of their inhabitants in early 2025 did not even make such efforts.

The Israeli military provided no shelter or humanitarian assistance to displaced camp residents. Once forced out of the camps, people were left to fend for themselves. Many sought shelter wherever they could, crowding into the homes of relatives or friends, or turning to mosques, schools, and local charities. A July 2025 Médecins Sans Frontières report on the West Bank found that displacement-affected communities face growing instability and unmet needs, such as access to healthcare and regular food and water.

The Israeli authorities also did not take into account the needs of people with disabilities, many of whom were unable to leave without assistance and who struggled to navigate the bulldozed streets and find accessible shelter.

When the Israeli government launched Operation Iron Wall, it announced its intention to eliminate what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred to as “terrorist elements.”

Prior to publication, on October 15, 2025, Human Rights Watch wrote to the Israeli military with an overview of this report’s preliminary findings and a list of questions relating to its research. The IDF International Press Desk responded by email on October 29, 2025, and this response is reflected in the report and reprinted in full as an appendix. The Israeli military confirmed their involvement in Operation Iron Wall, and said:

The operation was based on the understanding that terrorists exploit the terrain and the densely built environment of the camps, which restricts the IDF’s freedom of action. And that Hamas plants explosive devices in houses, civilian infrastructure, and along traffic routes in order to detonate them, thus endangering the lives of security forces and local residents.

The response included a links to photographs and videos depicting weapons allegedly found in civilian homes in the refugee camps and clips showing alleged fighting between the Israeli military and Palestinian fighters in the camps.

The Israeli military did not explain why the displacement of the entire population of all three camps was necessary to achieve its aims, nor whether alternatives had been considered. Rather, it stated that the “IDF has had to operate for an extended period of time, as required by operational needs and the circumstances on the ground.” The response did not answer Human Rights Watch’s questions about whether Israeli authorities had attempted to provide food, shelter, and access to medical services for the civilian population it had displaced, as required under international humanitarian law.

Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention only permits the displacement of civilians for the security of the population in an area or for imperative military reasons. The Israeli operations actually undermined the security of civilians affected and for displacement to qualify as a military imperative, it must be so essential that its failure would jeopardize an overall military objective.

It was not sufficient for the Israeli military to seek to justify wholesale civilian displacement solely on the basis of possible Palestinian fighters, weapons or installations in the refugee camps. Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, the occupying power needs to demonstrate that evacuating civilians was the *only* viable means it had at that moment to achieve its military aim. However, even had the government demonstrated this, it would also need to show that it had safely evacuated the population, provided them food and shelter, and ensured their return as soon as hostilities in the area ended.

Since the raids and forced displacement, Israeli authorities have repeatedly and uniformly denied camp residents the right to return to the camps, even though there are no active military operations taking place in the vicinity. Israeli soldiers have fired upon people trying to reach their homes, while only very few whose homes have been slated for demolition have been permitted a short window to return to collect essential belongings. The Israeli military has bulldozed and razed and cleared spaces for what appear to be bigger and wider access routes inside the camps and have blocked all entrances with earth mounds and barriers. In addition, Israeli soldiers have taken up positions inside the camps, where Israeli flags hang from buildings.

Within six months after the start of Operation Iron Wall, more than 850 buildings were destroyed or sustained heavy damage across all three camps, based on Human Rights Watch’s analysis of satellite imagery. A report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) found that all three camps showed widespread destruction and the presence of Israeli military vehicles, roadblocks, bulldozers, and excavators.

In response to Human Rights Watch’s questions about the extensive destruction in the camps, the Israeli authorities said they were acting “to reshape and stabilize the area,” and that “an inseparable part of this effort is the opening of new access routes inside the camps, which requires the demolition of rows of buildings.” While the response said that “a public notice was issued before the demolitions,” authorities did not comment on Human Rights Watch’s findings that many buildings across all three camps were demolished without corresponding demolition orders. The Israeli military did not answer questions as to whether and when the residents of the three camps would be allowed to return to their homes.

In addition to international humanitarian law, the right of return is upheld in various human rights conventions and has been affirmed for Palestinian refugees through United Nations General Assembly resolutions dating back to 1948 and reaffirmed since then. Palestinians from Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams refugee camps are largely refugees – those who were expelled or forced to flee their homes during the events surrounding Israel’s creation in 1948 in what Palestinians refer to as the *Nakba* (“Catastrophe” in Arabic) and their descendants.

Displacing some 32,000 Palestinians, descendants of those who were expelled and became refugees nearly 80 years ago, has enormous consequences. Every camp resident who spoke to Human Rights Watch said they believed Israel was trying to eliminate the “refugee question” by removing them from the camps and destroying the camps, and, in doing so, eliminate their broader right of return to their original homes and land in what is now the state of Israel.

This forced displacement reflects the broader pattern of ongoing rights violations by Israeli authorities against the Palestinian population, including the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution. Since the start of Operation Iron Wall, Israeli authorities have

not spoken of the camp residents' returning to their homes, nor did the authorities, in their October 29 response to questions from Human Rights Watch, address when they would allow Palestinians to return to the refugee camps. Instead, Minister in the Defense Ministry Bezalel Smotrich, who sits on the security cabinet and also serves as Minister of Finance, said if the camp residents "continue their acts of 'terrorism,'" the camps "will be uninhabitable ruins," and that "[t]heir residents will be forced to migrate and seek a new life in other countries."

The raids were carried out against a backdrop of increasing repression against Palestinians in the West Bank in recent years that escalated following the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led attacks by Palestinian armed groups on Israel. Since then, Israeli forces' killings of nearly 1,000 Palestinians in the West Bank, use of administrative detention without charge or trial, and expansion of illegal settlements reached years-long highs, while state-backed settler violence, home demolitions and ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian detainees have also increased.

Israeli authorities have also escalated their longstanding campaign to undermine the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN aid agency established in 1949 for Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. In early 2025, laws passed by the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, to block UNRWA from operating in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory came into effect. Since then, Israeli authorities have prevented UNRWA's international staff from entering Gaza, and blocked UNRWA, which had been the largest assistance provider, from distributing aid in Gaza. They also issued closure orders for UNRWA-operated schools in East Jerusalem, keeping them from opening in September 2025 to the detriment of nearly 800 children, some of whom have been unable to enroll elsewhere.

In its October 22 advisory decision, the ICJ found that "to the extent that Israel does not itself fulfil the obligations" under the Fourth Geneva Convention to provide for the occupied population, "leaving that responsibility to the United Nations acting through UNRWA, ... Israel is under the same positive and negative obligations to support and not to restrict the activities of those entities."²

² ICJ, "Obligations of Israel in relation to the Presence and Activities of the United Nations, Other International Organizations and Third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory," para. 132.

The Israeli military actions to permanently alter the camps months after taking control and presumably long since any military operation to root out “terrorist elements” demonstrates an intention to go beyond what is militarily necessary by carrying out systematic destruction without an evident military threat. The extensive destruction of civilian property not lawfully justified by military necessity is considered to be “wanton destruction” in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and those responsible should be prosecuted for war crimes.

Human Rights Watch has verified demolition orders related to the destruction of homes and other buildings across all three camps authorized by Maj. Gen. Abraham “Avi” Bluth, commander of the Central Command, and that reflect statements from the highest levels of the Israeli government. Bluth has publicly stated an intention to “reshape” the camps. Human Rights Watch’s satellite imagery-based analysis also shows large-scale destruction or heavy damage to buildings without a corresponding demolition order.

Beyond the immediate military action taken at the refugee camps, senior officials in the Israeli government have called for the displacement of camp populations for prolonged periods as a policy goal. “We will not return to the reality that was in the past,” said Minister of Defense Israel Katz in February 2025. “We will continue to clear refugee camps.”

Katz has furthermore called for permanent removal of the populations of the emptied camps, saying in February 2025, “I have instructed the IDF to prepare for a prolonged stay in the camps that have been cleared for the coming year – and not to allow residents to return and terrorism to grow again.” This statement, taken together with the Israeli authorities’ response to Human Rights Watch that referred to “reshaping” the camps and demolishing homes and other buildings without referencing residents’ returning, indicates an unlawful intent to prevent the return to the camps even after the end of hostilities in the area as required by international humanitarian law.

As the occupying power in the West Bank, the Israeli government remains responsible for ensuring food and health care of the population “[t]o the fullest extent of the means available to it” under articles 55 and 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Since early 2025, the Israeli military has apparently done nothing for the populations forced out of the camps. Data from OCHA shows that the Israeli authorities increased movement restrictions across the occupied West Bank, making it harder for humanitarian agencies to reach them.

Human Rights Watch found that the Israeli military's displacement of the populations in the West Bank refugee camps in early 2025 were carried out in violation of international humanitarian and human rights law, and amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Israeli military intentionally and purposefully displaced thousands of Palestinians in the refugee camps by means of forced displacement. It forcibly expelled people from their homes using violence and the fear of violence and at times used lethal force. The Israeli army did not provide safe routes out of the camps and just directed people to leave while at the same time apparently deploying snipers and immediately commencing the destruction of homes.

The organized, forced displacement of Palestinians in the refugee camps has removed nearly the entire Palestinian population from these areas that for decades and generations has been their home. This is evident in areas that have been razed, extended, and cleared for new and widened military access roads. These areas are now fully emptied of Palestinians, and the Israeli government has given no indication that the residents of the camps would be allowed to return.

Forced displacement can amount to a crime against humanity when it is committed as a part of a widespread or systematic "attack directed against a civilian population," which means the multiple commission of such crimes committed pursuant to a state or organizational policy. The crime against humanity of forced displacement is defined under the Rome Statute as deportation or forcible transfer, meaning forced displacement of the persons concerned by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully present, outside the limited exceptions permitted under international law.

By expelling tens of thousands of Palestinians from refugee camps, dictating the manner of their displacement, and preventing their return for months after military operations ended, Israeli forces have carried out widespread, systematic, and intentional forced displacement that amounts to crimes against humanity. The actions by Israeli authorities to remove Palestinians from the refugee camps by violent means also amounts to "ethnic cleansing," a non-legal term to describe the actions of one ethnic or religious group against another ethnic or religious group.

Individuals responsible for the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity can face criminal liability not only in the domestic courts of the country where the crimes took place, but also in international courts and tribunals, as well as in other countries' courts under the principle of universal jurisdiction in accordance with national laws. Under the principle of command or superior responsibility, military and civilian officials up to the top of the chain of command can also be held criminally responsible for crimes committed by their subordinates. Command responsibility attaches when superiors knew or should have known that their subordinates were committing such crimes but failed to take reasonable measures to prevent the crimes or punish those responsible.

Human Rights Watch's research indicates that Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth, as the commander of Central Command in charge of military operations in the West Bank, should be investigated for individual criminal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including as a matter of command responsibility, concerning the expulsion, some 32,000 people from the refugee camps of Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams.



"We are operating in the refugee camps and carrying out significant operations that change the character of the entire area."

Major General Abraham "Avi" Bluth
Head of the Central Command, April 2025

Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth reports to the Chief of the General Staff of the Israeli army. Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi held this role until March 5, 2025, at which time Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir took over. Halevi and Zamir should also be investigated for individual criminal responsibility in these crimes as a matter of command responsibility.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Minister of Defense Israel Katz, and Minister in the Defense Ministry Bezalel Smotrich, who sits on the security cabinet and also serves as Minister of Finance, should also be investigated for individual criminal responsibility, including as a matter of command responsibility, for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The ICC Office of the Prosecutor and domestic judicial authorities under the principle of universal jurisdiction should investigate those Israeli officials credibly implicated in war crimes and crimes against humanity in the West Bank, including as a matter of command responsibility.

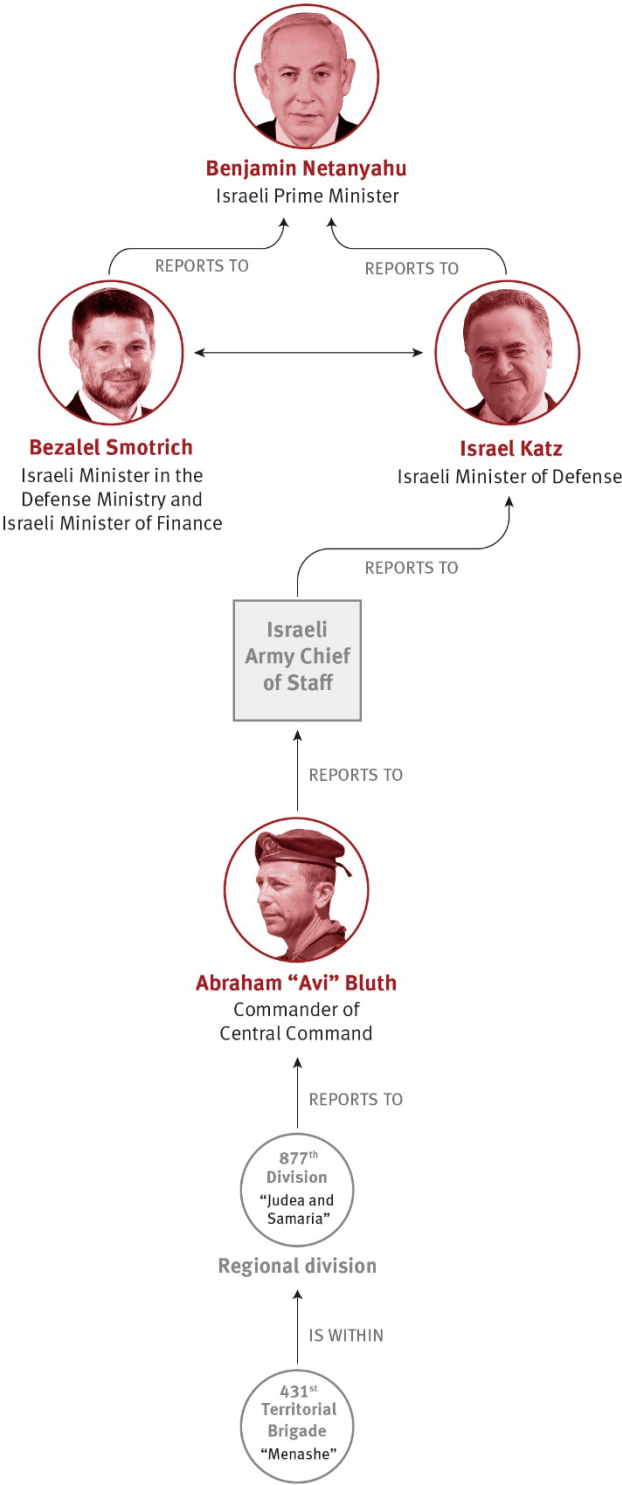


“I instructed the IDF to prepare for a long stay in the camps that were cleared, for the coming year, and not allow residents to return.”

Israel Katz
Israeli Minister of Defense

Investigate for Individual Criminal Responsibility

○ Authorities should investigate those circled in red, who may have individual criminal responsibility, including command responsibility



Governments should impose targeted sanctions against Bluth, Smotrich, Katz, Netanyahu, and other Israeli officials implicated in ongoing grave abuses in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. They should take other actions to press Israeli authorities to end their repressive policies, including imposing an arms embargo, suspending preferential trade agreements with Israel, banning trade with illegal West Bank settlements, and committing to enforce the ICC's arrest warrants.

Governments should adhere to the full set of obligations set out in the landmark July 2024 ICJ advisory opinion on Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territory. The ruling found Israel's decades-long occupation to be unlawful and in breach of the Palestinians' right to self-determination. The court found that Israel is responsible for apartheid and other serious abuses against the Palestinians, that its settlements are illegal and should be dismantled, and that the Palestinians are entitled to reparations. The court set out numerous obligations on third states to ensure the implementation of its findings, including that they should not recognize any changes in the physical character or demographic composition of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It concluded, as it has previously, that all states parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention must cooperate with the United Nations to "put into effect modalities required to ensure an end to Israel's illegal presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory."

The raids and displacement at the West Bank refugee camps were occurring while global attention was focused on the devastating hostilities in Gaza, where Israeli authorities have carried out ethnic cleansing, war crimes, crimes against humanity – including forced displacement and extermination – and acts of genocide. Far less attention has been on Israeli authorities' serious violations of international law in the West Bank. With a new Gaza ceasefire in place and the global focus on avoiding a return to hostilities there, there is a real risk that Israeli authorities will be given more of a free hand in the West Bank to continue targeting refugee camps and escalating grave crimes against Palestinians there. Governments should urgently act to end the forced displacement of Palestinians, ensure their right of return, and prevent further repression of the Palestinian population.

Recommendations

To the Israeli Government

- Immediately stop forcibly displacing Palestinian civilians anywhere in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
- Publicly declare that all residents of the three refugee camps of Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams, will immediately be able to return to their homes and places of origin.
- Halt the demolitions and razing and bulldozing of buildings and creation of new roads in all three refugee camps that make permanent changes to the territory.
- Ensure that the humanitarian needs of displaced civilians are met, including food, shelter, and health care, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention.
- Recognize and fulfill the right of Palestinians to return to their homes or areas of origin in the West Bank, other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, or Israel.
- Set up a fair, accessible, independent, and gender-competent mechanism to provide reparation for gross human rights abuses against Palestinians from the refugee camps, including compensation, restitution, justice, and guarantees of non-recurrence. Ensure that victims' rights are central to the process and victims themselves, including full participation by women, play a key role in designing the process. This should include compensation for any forced displacement or unlawful destruction of property.
- Immediately grant access to the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, and the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.
- Accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, cooperate fully in the court's investigations, and cease coercive measures against human rights groups and others advocating for justice before the court.

To All Governments

- Publicly condemn Israel's forced displacement of the civilian population in Jenin, Nur Shams, and Tulkarem refugee camps as violations of international law by Israeli authorities.

- Urge the Israeli government to immediately halt those violations, allow all Palestinians displaced to return to their homes, and provide them with compensation for damages.
- Cooperate with international judicial bodies and investigative mechanisms investigating the forced displacement at the refugee camps.
- Increase public and private pressure on the Israeli government to stop violating international humanitarian law and international human rights law and fully comply with its obligations and the binding orders and advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).
- Publicly support and provide funding for UNRWA and oppose the Israeli government's efforts to restrict its work.
- Press the Israeli government to recognize the right of Palestinians, including refugees, to return to their homes.
- Call upon the Israeli government to grant access to independent, international monitors, including the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel and the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.
- Impose targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, against Israeli officials and others credibly implicated in ongoing serious abuses, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Minister of Defense Israel Katz, Minister in the Defense Ministry Bezalel Smotrich, and Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth.
- Suspend military assistance and arms sales to Israel so long as its forces commit violations of international humanitarian law with impunity.
- Enforce domestic legislation limiting the transfer of arms and military assistance for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.
- Investigate and appropriately prosecute those credibly implicated in war crimes and crimes against humanity stemming from Israeli authorities' operations in the West Bank since January 2025, under the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws.
- Suspend preferential trade agreements with Israel as long as the Israeli government refuses to comply with their obligations as lined out in ICJ rulings and advisory opinions and continue to commit serious abuses, including the crimes against humanity of apartheid, persecution and forced displacement, against Palestinians.

- Publicly express support for the International Criminal Court, strongly condemning efforts to intimidate or interfere with its work, including coercive measures against court officials and those cooperating with or seeking justice at the court, and committing to support the execution of all its warrants.
- Address root causes of grave abuses, including by recognizing Israeli authorities' crimes of apartheid and persecution against millions of Palestinians.

To the International Criminal Court Office of the Prosecutor

- Investigate as war crimes and the crime against humanity of forcible transfer during Israeli authorities' forced displacement and other unlawful conduct in operations in the West Bank since January 2025.
- Investigate the individual criminal responsibility or command responsibility of Israeli officials for war crimes and the crime against humanity of forcible transfer.

To UNRWA

- Abolish the discriminatory patrilineal descent requirement for UNRWA refugee status that excludes from refugee registration the descendants of women who qualified or qualify as Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate but whose husbands did not or do not qualify as refugees under UNRWA's mandate.

Methodology

This report is based on interviews conducted between March and August 2025 with 31 internally displaced Palestinians from Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams refugee camps in the West Bank between the ages of 16 and 70. Of those interviewed, 20 are women, 10 are men, and one is a 16-year-old girl.

All interviews were either in person in the West Bank in March and June 2025, or by telephone in June and August 2025. Interviews were conducted in Arabic or with interpreters who translated from Arabic to English.

All interviews were conducted in private settings – either alone or with the interviewee’s immediate family members present – with assurances of confidentiality. Researchers informed all interviewees about the purpose and voluntary nature of the interviews, and the ways in which Human Rights Watch would use the information. All were told they could decline to answer questions or could end the interview at any time.

To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for all interviewees except for cases that are already in the public domain. Real names are also used for the documented killings of Ahmed Nimer al-Shaib, Sundos Shalabi, and Rahaf al-Ashqar.

Human Rights Watch was unable to physically access the camps of Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams because they are closed by the Israeli military. However, researchers spoke to displaced camp residents from Jenin, Tulkarem, and other nearby areas and analyzed dozens of satellite images at different spatial resolutions to assess the scale and patterns of the destruction across the three camps, six months after the beginning of Operation Iron Wall.

To estimate the number of buildings slated for demolition, Human Rights Watch reviewed information included in the Humanitarian Situation Updates issued by the United Nations Office for Coordination and Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and demolition orders posted across social media platforms and likely issued by Israeli military.

To determine locations and to estimate the time and date of specific events that witnesses described occurring during Israeli military raids, demolitions of their homes, or while they

were trying to retrieve their belongings, Human Rights Watch matched landmarks in the videos with satellite imagery, street-level photographs, or other visual material and compared with witness accounts.

Human Rights Watch analyzed and verified 31 videos, 27 photographs, and 5 maps posted online; 2 videos and 2 photographs shared with researchers to help corroborate witness accounts and piece together what happened during and after the raids, to identify visible insignia and the types of military equipment used, and to document demolition techniques. Human Rights Watch additionally reviewed approximately 200 videos and photographs posted to Telegram channels used by residents in the camps, and other social media. Where possible, Human Rights Watch used the position of the sun and any resulting shadows visible in videos and photographs to estimate the time of day the content was recorded. Researchers also confirmed that each piece of content had not appeared online prior to the date it was posted, using various reverse search image engines.

Human Rights Watch has adopted specific terminology to distinguish between audiovisual content that we have analyzed and content we have also verified. In the report, Human Rights Watch uses the term “reviewed” for content that has been seen but has not gone through several verification checks. We use the term “analyzed” for content that has been reviewed and appears authentic, but for which we have confirmed some but not all temporal, geographic, or contextual aspects. We use the term “verified” for videos or photographs where we were able to confirm the location, timeframe, and context in which they were taken. We use the term “confirmed” when another individual or organization verified content, which we then checked for accuracy, and confirmed its location, timeframe and context.

Human Rights Watch has preserved the photographs and videos referenced in the report. Where relevant, researchers have included direct links to social media posts in the relevant footnotes. Human Rights Watch chose not to include some links to online content for reasons that included: potential security risks to the people depicted; to avoid sharing dehumanizing representations of people; and that might pose a security risk for the people seen in the content or the person posting it. Researchers also did not include links to content deemed too distressing to maintain the dignity of those shown and minimize readers’ exposure to violent and distressing content.

Background

Israel has been occupying the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip – the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) – since 1967. In 1993 and 1995, the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the Oslo Accords, which created the Palestinian Authority (PA) to manage some Palestinian affairs in parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory for a transitional period, not exceeding five years, until the parties forged a permanent status agreement.³ The Oslo Accords, supplemented by later agreements, divided the West Bank largely into three distinct regions: Area A, where the PA would manage full security and civil affairs, Area B, where the PA would manage civil affairs and Israel would have security control, and Area C, under the exclusive control of Israel. Area A largely incorporates the major Palestinian city centers, Area B, the majority of Palestinian towns and many villages, and Area C, the remaining 60 percent of the West Bank.

The Oslo Accords, though, did not end the occupation in any part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The parties did not reach a final status agreement by 2000, nor did they in the more than two decades since, despite off and on negotiations primarily mediated by the United States. The West Bank remains divided among Areas A, B, and C, with Israel retaining overall principal security control of all areas, and the PA managing some affairs in Areas A and B, which accounts for about 39 percent of the land in the occupied West Bank.⁴ Israeli authorities continued to facilitate the expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank, where more than 730,000 Israelis now reside, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In the occupied West Bank, Israel subjects Palestinians to draconian military law and enforces segregation, largely prohibiting Palestinians from entering settlements, and severely restricting freedom of movement. This repression of Palestinians in the West

³ United Nations, “Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (aka ‘Oslo II’),” undated, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-185434/> and “Agreement – Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (aka ‘Oslo Accord’),” undated, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-180015/> (accessed September 16, 2025).

⁴ “What are areas A, B, and C of the occupied West Bank?,” Al Jazeera, September 11, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/11/what-are-areas-a-b-and-c-of-the-occupied-west-bank> (accessed September 10, 2025).

Bank is part of the Israeli government's crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution against Palestinians.⁵

In recent years, Israeli officials have called for the unilateral annexation of additional parts of the West Bank. In May 2025, Israel's cabinet voted to take sole responsibility for land registration in Area C of the occupied West Bank, a decision that some civil society organizations have described "as effective Israeli annexation of the majority of Palestinian land."⁶ Settlement expansion across the Occupied Palestinian Territory has significantly increased in recent years. In 2025, alone, Israeli authorities had by mid-September advanced plans to build a total of 25,000 housing units in settlements in the West Bank, a record for one year, according to the Israeli group Peace Now.⁷

Refugee Camps

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is mandated by the UN General Assembly to serve "Palestine refugees." UNRWA sets out that "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict," qualify as refugees under its mandate.⁸ It adds that "Palestine refugees, and descendants of Palestine refugee males, including legally adopted children, are eligible to register for UNRWA services."⁹ While they are not registered as Palestinian refugees, the General Assembly has also mandated UNRWA to provide services to "persons in the region who are currently displaced and in serious need of continued

⁵ Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, April 27, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>.

⁶ Lubna Masarwa and Rayhan Uddin, "Israel to take full control of land registry in West Bank's Area C, cementing annexation," *Middle East Eye*, May 12, 2025, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-take-full-control-land-registry-area-c-annexation>, (accessed August 8, 2025). See also *Sovereignty in All but Name: Israel's Quickening Annexation of the West Bank*, International Crisis Group report, October 9, 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/israelpalestine/252-sovereignty-all-name-israels-quickening-annexation-west-bank> (accessed November 11, 2025).

⁷ Peace Now, "Advancement of 1,276 Housing Units in the West Bank," September 16, 2025, <https://peacenow.org.il/en/advancement-of-1276-housing-units-in-the-west-bank> (accessed November 10, 2025).

⁸ "Consolidated Eligibility and Registration Instructions (CERI)," UNRWA, undated, <https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2010011995652.pdf> (accessed October 3, 2025).

⁹ *Ibid.* If UNRWA refugee status passed through both maternal and paternal lines, the number of Palestinian refugees would be significantly higher. See Francesca Albanese, "UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees Under Attack: When Politics Trump Law and History," *Jadaliyya*, October 1, 2018, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/38006/UNRWA-and-Palestinian-Refugees-Under-Attack-When-Politics-Trump-Law-and-History> (accessed October 6, 2025); "UNRWA Myths and Facts," *J Street*, <https://jstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/UNRWA-Myths-Facts.pdf> (accessed October 15, 2025).

assistance as a result of the 1967 and subsequent hostilities.”¹⁰ More than 910,000 UNRWA-registered refugees live in the West Bank, around a quarter of whom live in 19 refugee camps.¹¹ UNRWA specifically established the three refugee camps covered in this report – Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams –to house Palestinians who were expelled from their homes or forced to flee during the events surrounding Israel’s creation in 1948 and their descendants.

Since their establishment in the 1950s, the camps have increased in size and density and become marked by overcrowding, forcing the boundaries to expand over the years into neighboring areas.

Over the years, the Israeli military has frequently raided the camps, which have often been a hub for both armed and non-violent resistance to the occupation, and carried out military operations against the fighters they allege are based there.¹² During one 10-day raid of the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002 during the second *Intifada*, Israeli forces killed scores of Palestinians, some willfully or unlawfully in acts that amounted to war crimes, as Human Rights Watch documented.¹³ While camp residents have been forced to relocate as a result of these incursions, for the first time in 2025, the Israeli military has expelled the entire population of the camps, displacing thousands people in the West Bank at a scale not seen since 1967, conducted widespread demolitions, and prevented return.¹⁴

¹⁰ UN General Assembly, Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities, Resolution A/RES/53/48 (1998), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/265108?ln=en&v=pdf> (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹¹ “West Bank,” UNRWA, undated, <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank> (accessed August 8, 2025).

¹² See “Six killed in Israeli strike on refugee camp in occupied West Bank,” Al Jazeera, December 23, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/27/six-killed-in-israeli-strike-on-refugee-camp-in-occupied-west-bank>; “Escalating violence and human rights violations in the West Bank,” Norwegian Refugee Council news release, July 19, 2024, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2024/july/escalating-violence-and-human-rights-violations-in-the-west-bank>; “At least 10 killed as Israel launches major raid on occupied West Bank,” Al Jazeera, August 28, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/28/at-least-7-killed-as-israel-launches-major-raid-on-occupied-west-bank>; and “Israeli forces kill at least 8 in occupied West Bank raids, drone strikes,” Al Jazeera, December 25, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/25/israeli-forces-kill-at-least-8-in-occupied-west-bank-raids-drone-strikes>; (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹³ Human Rights Watch, *Israel, the Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian Authorities Territories, Jenin: IDF Military Operations*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (E), May 2002, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/israel3/israelo502.pdf>, (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹⁴ OXFAM, “Surge in Israeli violence causes largest forced displacement in west bank since 1967, widespread destruction and severely hampers humanitarian work,” February 26, 2025, <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/media/press-releases/surge-in-israeli-violence-causes-largest-forced-displacement-in-west-bank-since-1967-widespread-destruction-and-severely-hampers-humanitarian-work/> (accessed August 8, 2025); “Humanitarian Situation Update #337 | West Bank,” OCHA, November 6, 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-337-west-bank> (accessed November 11, 2025).

Escalation of Repression of Palestinians in the West Bank in Recent Years

The raids and forced displacement of refugee camps in early 2025 took place amid escalating Israeli repression of Palestinians in the West Bank. Since March 2022 but particularly since October 2023, Israeli forces have escalated their operations across the West Bank. Since the attacks by Hamas-led Palestinian armed groups on Israel on October 7, 2023, Israeli forces and armed settlers have killed more than 1,000 Palestinians, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).¹⁵ Human Rights Watch has repeatedly documented their unlawful use of excessive and lethal force.¹⁶ The number of Palestinians killed the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in the year after October 7, 2023 was more than in any other year since 2005, when the UN began systematically recording fatalities.¹⁷ UNICEF documented 39 cases of children killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between January and July 2025.¹⁸ Israeli authorities rarely hold accountable, much less prosecute, security force personnel who use excessive force, torture, or commit other abuses against Palestinians.¹⁹

In addition, Israeli authorities holding Palestinians in administrative detention without trial or charge has in this period reached a 30-year-high.²⁰ As of November 1, 2025, Israeli authorities held 3,368 Palestinians in administrative detention, as well as 1,205 Palestinians from Gaza under the “Unlawful Combatants” law, a more restrictive form of

¹⁵ “1001 Palestinians killed in West Bank since 7 October 2023 – one in five are children,” UN press release, October 17, 2025, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/ohchr-press-release-17oct25/> (accessed November 11, 2025); and “West Bank: Israeli Forces’ Unlawful Killings of Palestinians,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 8, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/08/west-bank-israeli-forces-unlawful-killings-palestinians>.

¹⁶ “West Bank: Spike in Israeli Killings of Palestinian Children,” Human Rights Watch news release, August 28, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/28/west-bank-spike-israeli-killings-palestinian-children>.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025, Israel and Palestine chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/israel-and-palestine>.

¹⁸ “UNICEF State of Palestine Humanitarian Situation Report No. 41, 31 July 2025,” UNICEF, August 20, 2025, <https://www.unicef.org/documents/unicef-state-palestine-humanitarian-situation-report-no-41-31-july-2025> (accessed September 10, 2025).

¹⁹ “Palestine: ICC Should Open Formal Probe,” Human Rights Watch news release, June 5, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/05/palestine-icc-should-open-formal-probe>.

²⁰ HaMoked (@HaMokedRights), post to X, September 3, 2023, <https://x.com/HaMokedRights/status/1698236188908212576?s=20> (accessed November 11, 2025).

administrative detention.²¹ Additionally, reports have surged of ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian detainees in the West Bank.²²

Parallel to state violence, Human Rights Watch has documented a sharp spike in settler violence against Palestinians across the West Bank since October 2023, often with the acquiescence or active support of Israeli soldiers.²³ Settlers have attacked Palestinian villagers, burned homes and property, and forcibly displaced dozens of communities. Between October 7, 2023, and April 3, 2024, settler violence displaced Palestinians from twenty communities and entirely uprooted seven communities.²⁴ During this period, the UN recorded more than 700 settler attacks, with Israeli soldiers in uniform present at nearly half of the attacks. In 2025, settler violence reached an 18-year-high, with more incidents resulting during the first nine months resulting in casualties or property damage (2,660) than in any other since at least 2006, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).²⁵

Between October 7, 2023 and September 8, 2025, Palestinian gunmen and unidentified attackers in the West Bank killed 18 Israeli civilians, 13 of them settlers, in addition to 23 members of Israeli security forces, according to OCHA.²⁶ On January 6, 2025, two Palestinian gunmen shot and killed two Israeli woman, both settlers, and an Israeli police officer near the village of al-Funduq.²⁷ Israeli forces later killed two men they allege were responsible in Burqin, just over two kilometers southwest of Jenin refugee camp, on

²¹ “9,204 ‘Security’ Inmates Are Held in Prisons Inside Israel,” HaMoked, November 2025, <https://hamoked.org/prisoners-charts.php> (accessed November 11, 2025).

²² “West Bank: Israeli Forces’ Unlawful Killings of Palestinians,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 8, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/08/west-bank-israeli-forces-unlawful-killings-palestinians>; “While a Fire Rages in Gaza, the West Bank Smolders,” November 22, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/22/while-fire-rages-gaza-west-bank-smolders>.

²³ “West Bank: Israel Responsible for Rising Settler Violence,” Human Rights Watch news release, April 17, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/17/west-bank-israel-responsible-rising-settler-violence>.

²⁴ “Israel must stop killings and home demolitions in occupied West Bank,” OHCHR news release, July 15, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2025/07/israel-must-stop-killings-and-home-demolitions-occupied-west-bank> (accessed November 11, 2025).

²⁵ “West Bank Monthly Snapshot - Casualties, Property Damage and Displacement | September 2025,” OCHA monthly snapshot, October 16, 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-monthly-snapshot-casualties-property-damage-and-displacement-september-2025> (accessed November 11, 2025).

²⁶ “Data on casualties,” OCHA - Occupied Palestinian Territory, undated, <https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties> (accessed September 1, 2025).

²⁷ “Three Israelis killed in Palestinian shooting attack in West Bank,” BBC, January 6, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdjgv1r4x810> (accessed September 1, 2025).

January 22, during the large-scale assault on the refugee camp.²⁸ In another attack, on May 15, 2025, a Palestinian gunman shot and killed a pregnant Israeli woman driving near the settlement of Bruchin in the northern West Bank.²⁹ Her baby, delivered via Caesarean section, died 15 days later.³⁰

²⁸ “In Jenin, IDF kills 2 gunmen who shot 3 Israelis dead in terror attack this month,” Times of Israel, January 23, 2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-jenin-idf-kills-2-gunmen-who-shot-3-israelis-dead-in-terror-attack-this-month/> (accessed September 1, 2025).

²⁹ “Pregnant Israeli Woman Killed in West Bank Shooting Attack; Baby in Serious Condition,” Haaretz, May 15, 2025, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-05-15/ty-article/.premium/pregnant-israeli-woman-shot-in-west-bank-dies-of-wounds-baby-delivered-by-c-section/00000196-d1f9-d9a9-a99e-f3fd7a890000> (accessed November 11, 2025).

³⁰ Jeremy Sharon, “Baby of pregnant terror victim dies after fighting for his life for two weeks,” Times of Israel, May 29, 2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/baby-of-pregnant-terror-victim-dies-after-fighting-for-his-life-for-two-weeks/> (accessed November 11, 2025).

“Operation Iron Wall”

Refugee camps that were once full of life...are now reduced to rubble. ...This is not just destruction: it is part of systematic forced displacement.

– Roland Friedrich, Director of UNRWA Affairs in the West Bank, June 2025³¹

“Operation Iron Wall,” the name the Israeli government gave to its large-scale military operation in the northern West Bank in 2025, involved the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), and Border Police. It was intended, in the words of Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz, to “destroy the infrastructure of terror.”³² In a February 10, 2025 press release, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) stated:

Palestinian armed groups are also increasingly active in the northern West Bank, deploying improvised explosive devices inside refugee camps, including near UNRWA facilities and civilian infrastructure. They have engaged in violent clashes with both Israeli and Palestinian Forces. From December 2024 onwards, Palestinian Forces operations further exacerbated displacement from Jenin camp.³³

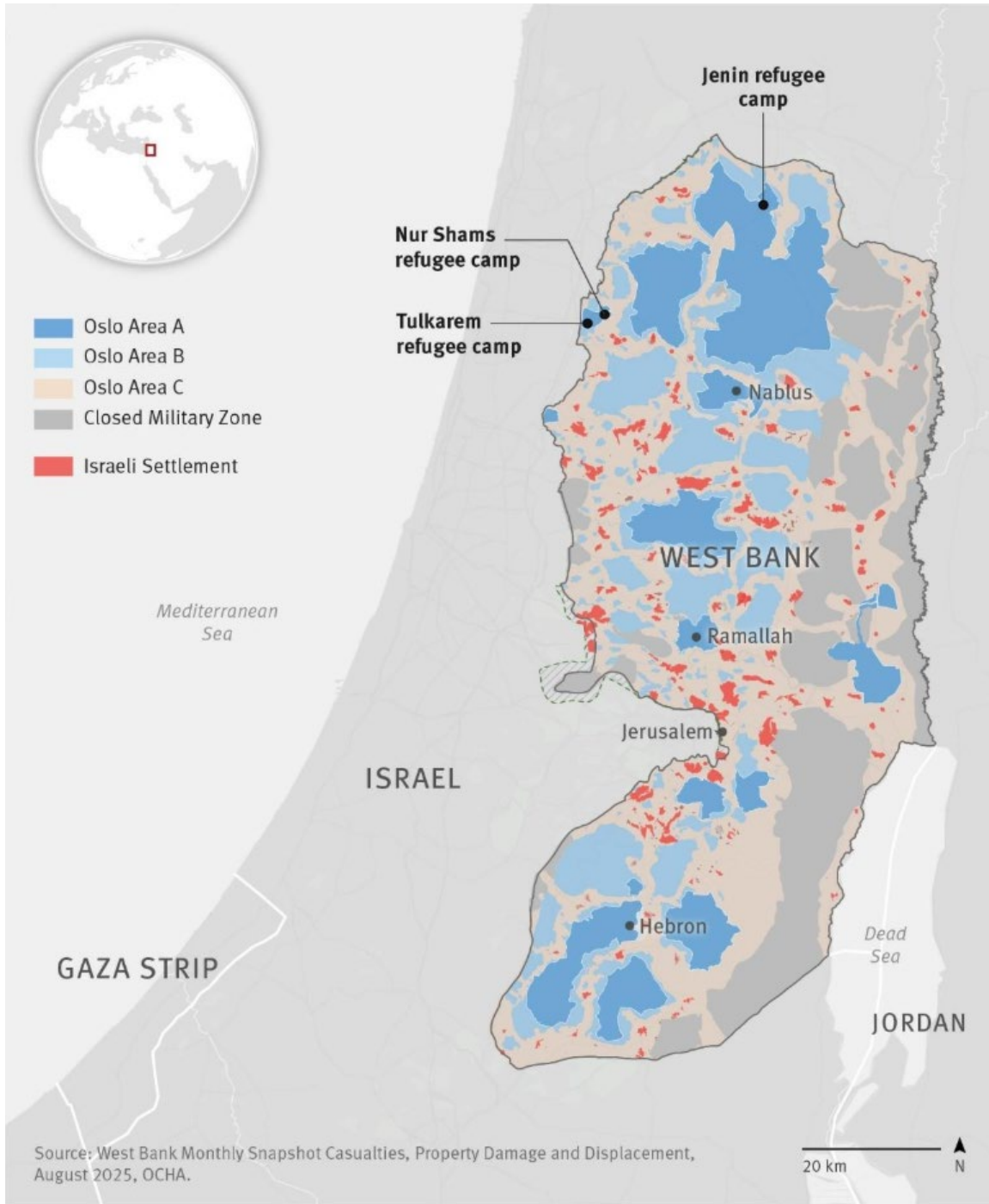
The campaign first concentrated on Jenin refugee camp in January 2025, but quickly expanded to Tulkarem and Nur Shams refugee camps, and neighboring villages and areas. While the Israeli authorities claimed that the camps were emptied in February 2025, the Israeli military presence remained, causing widespread destruction through the demolition of buildings and preventing return of the camps’ inhabitants. This report focuses on the

³¹ “UNRWA official says Israel turned West Bank refugee camps into rubble in a ‘systematic forced displacement’ plan,” Middle East Monitor news release, June 27, 2025, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250627-unrwa-official-says-israel-turned-west-bank-refugee-camps-into-rubble-in-a-systematic-forced-displacement-plan/> (accessed November 11, 2025).

³² “Israel Katz vows IDF to remain in Jenin to ensure terror ‘does not return,’” *iz4news*, January 29, 2025, <https://www.iz4news.tv/en/news/israel/defense/artc-israel-katz-vows-idf-to-remain-in-jenin-to-ensure-terror-does-not-return>, (accessed August 8, 2025). See also “What is Israel’s Operation Iron Wall?,” video clip, Sky News YouTube, February 24, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNRaFaeKuc8> (accessed August 8, 2025).

³³ “Large-scale forced displacement in the West Bank impacts 40,000 people,” UNRWA press release, February 10, 2025, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/large-scale-forced-displacement-west-bank-impacts-40000-people> (accessed November 11, 2025).

conduct of the Israeli military and forced displacement from these three refugee camps through July 2025.



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The Evacuation Exception

Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention regulates the displacement of civilians in occupied territories, placing restrictions on the forced relocation of individuals by an occupying power during conflicts.³⁴ A lawful evacuation order is an exception to the general prohibition against the forcible displacement of people from their homes. A military or governmental authority typically issues an order to remove civilians from an area at high risk of fighting or other danger. Such an order can be issued in anticipation of military operations that may last over a more extended period or in response to ongoing or expected hostilities. Lawful evacuation orders aim to safeguard the civilian population by temporarily moving them to safer locations. While article 49 requires the occupying power to return civilians “as soon as hostilities in the area in question have ceased,” the prohibition against forcible displacement under occupation law does not *require* active hostilities. The prohibition applies for the entire duration of the occupation, even when no fighting is occurring.³⁵

In Gaza, the Israeli military stated that it was using a range of methods to evacuate the population safely. But Human Rights Watch found no plausible imperative military reason to justify the mass displacement of the population and that these actions amounted to war crimes and the crime against humanity of forced displacement.³⁶ In the northern West Bank, the Israeli military failed to implement any form of organized evacuation system that would have allowed residents of all three camps to leave safely. The Israeli military has at times claimed that it was not forcing the population of the refugee camps to evacuate, and at others claimed the opposite: amidst the Jenin raids, the Israeli military said it was

³⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Geneva Convention IV (1949), art. 49, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/assets/treaties/380-GC-IV-EN.pdf> (accessed November 11, 2025).

³⁵ International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Prosecutor v. Milomir Stakić, Case No. IT-97-24-T, July 31, 2003, Judgment (Trial Chamber), <https://www.refworld.org/jurisprudence/caselaw/icty/2003/en/40192> and ICTY, Prosecutor v. Milomir Stakić, Case No.: IT-97-24-A, Appeals, March 22, 2006, <https://www.icty.org/x/cases/stakic/acjug/en/sta-ajo60322e.pdf> (accessed November 11, 2025). The ICJ has also held that Israel’s construction of settlements and measures causing displacement in occupied Palestinian territory breach article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. See ICJ, Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion (“Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Wall”), July 9, 2004, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-178825/> (accessed November 11, 2025), paras. 120-122.

³⁶ ICJ, “Public sitting held on Friday, January 12, 2024, at 10 a.m., at the Peace Palace, President Donoghue presiding, in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel),” Document Number: 192-20240112-ORA-01-00-BI, Verbatim Record, January 12, 2024, <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203424> (accessed July 1, 2025).

“enabling any resident who chooses to exit from the area to do so via secure and organised routes with the protection of Israeli security forces.”³⁷

Human Rights Watch found that the military entered and stormed each of the three camps without prior evacuation orders, conducting military operations while simultaneously forcing civilians to flee. In February 2025, Israeli Minister of Defense Israel Katz said, “I instructed the IDF to prepare for a long stay in the camps that were cleared, for the coming year, and not allow residents to return.”³⁸

Jenin Raid

In December 2024, the Palestinian Authority (PA) conducted a large-scale security campaign called “Protect the Homeland.” It targeted “outlaws and militants” with the aim of restoring “law and order” in Jenin refugee camp and the city of Jenin. From mid-December 2024 to January 20, 2025, the PA conducted operations in the camp – raiding homes and mosques, resulting in arrests and a number of deaths, including security officers, at least two children, a journalism student, and an unarmed resident riding a motorcycle, according to the Palestinian statutory body, the Independent Commission for Human Rights.³⁹ Residents said that, beginning in December 2024, confrontations between PA forces and fighters in the camp led to severe damage to electricity cables and water tanks on the roofs and the cutting off of essential services, including electricity, water, and access to food. That same day, trucks began dumping mounds of dirt, blocking entry or exit from the camp.⁴⁰

³⁷ “Residents leave homes in Jenin as Israeli West Bank raid continues,” Reuters, January 23, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/residents-leave-homes-jenin-israeli-west-bank-raid-continues-2025-01-23/> (accessed September 25, 2025).

³⁸ Zein Khalil and Ikram Kouachi, “Israel says army to stay ‘for next year’ in Palestinian refugee camp in occupied West Bank,” Anadolu Agency, February 23, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-says-army-to-stay-for-next-year-in-palestinian-refugee-camp-in-occupied-west-bank/3490658?utm> (accessed August 8, 2025).

³⁹ Mat Nashed, “Palestinian Authority’s raid on Jenin appeals to Israeli, Western interests,” Al Jazeera, December 30, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/12/30/the-pa-crackdown-on-palestinians-appeals-to-israeli-western-interests> and Yara Hawari, “PA’s brutal siege on Jenin only deepens its crisis of legitimacy,” Al Jazeera, January 3, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/1/3/pas-brutal-siege-on-jenin-only-deepens-its-crisis-of-legitimacy> (accessed November 11, 2025).

⁴⁰ A photograph posted to Telegram at 2:08 p.m. on January 20, 2025, and verified by Human Rights Watch shows a truck dumping mounds of dirt just to the north of the camp. At 2:20 p.m. that same day, another photograph posted and verified by researchers showed two large mounds of earth blocking vehicle access to the road.

PA forces appear to have left the camp on or before January 21,⁴¹ hours before the commencement of Israel's Iron Wall military operation. Operation Iron Wall officially began on January 21, just two days after a ceasefire between Palestinian armed groups and the Israeli military took effect in Gaza on January 19, 2025.⁴² It involved ground troops, aerial fire from Apache helicopters, drones, armored vehicles, and bulldozers.⁴³

The Israeli military said it was operating in Jenin to target alleged Palestinian militants in the refugee camp, with the Israeli military spokesperson Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani telling reporters in a briefing that the operation was intended to prevent militants "from regrouping" and attacking Israeli civilians.⁴⁴

Fatima B., 44, said that on January 21 she was with her husband and four children at home in the central al-Hawasheen neighborhood in the center of Jenin camp when the Israeli military raid started:

It was around noon, and I heard the sound of an aircraft and it sounded like it was shooting at people. ... At first, we hid inside the house – we didn't know what was happening, we stayed hidden for maybe five to ten minutes, but then we heard people outside shouting, saying we should leave.⁴⁵

A video posted at 12:33 p.m. to a Telegram channel used by Jenin refugee camp residents shows a siren blaring from a mosque in Jenin camp. Aircraft can be heard in the air.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Researchers reviewed dozens of videos and reports posted to Telegram on January 19 and late into the night on January 20, showing or describing clashes in the camp, reportedly between PA forces and fighters. Researchers geolocated one video posted at 10:38 p.m. which shows a mosque in the camp, and the sounds of gunfire ringing out. عش النبابير مخيم جنين (@jeniincamp) post to Telegram, January 20, 2025, <https://t.me/jeniincamp/95828> (accessed September 16, 2025).

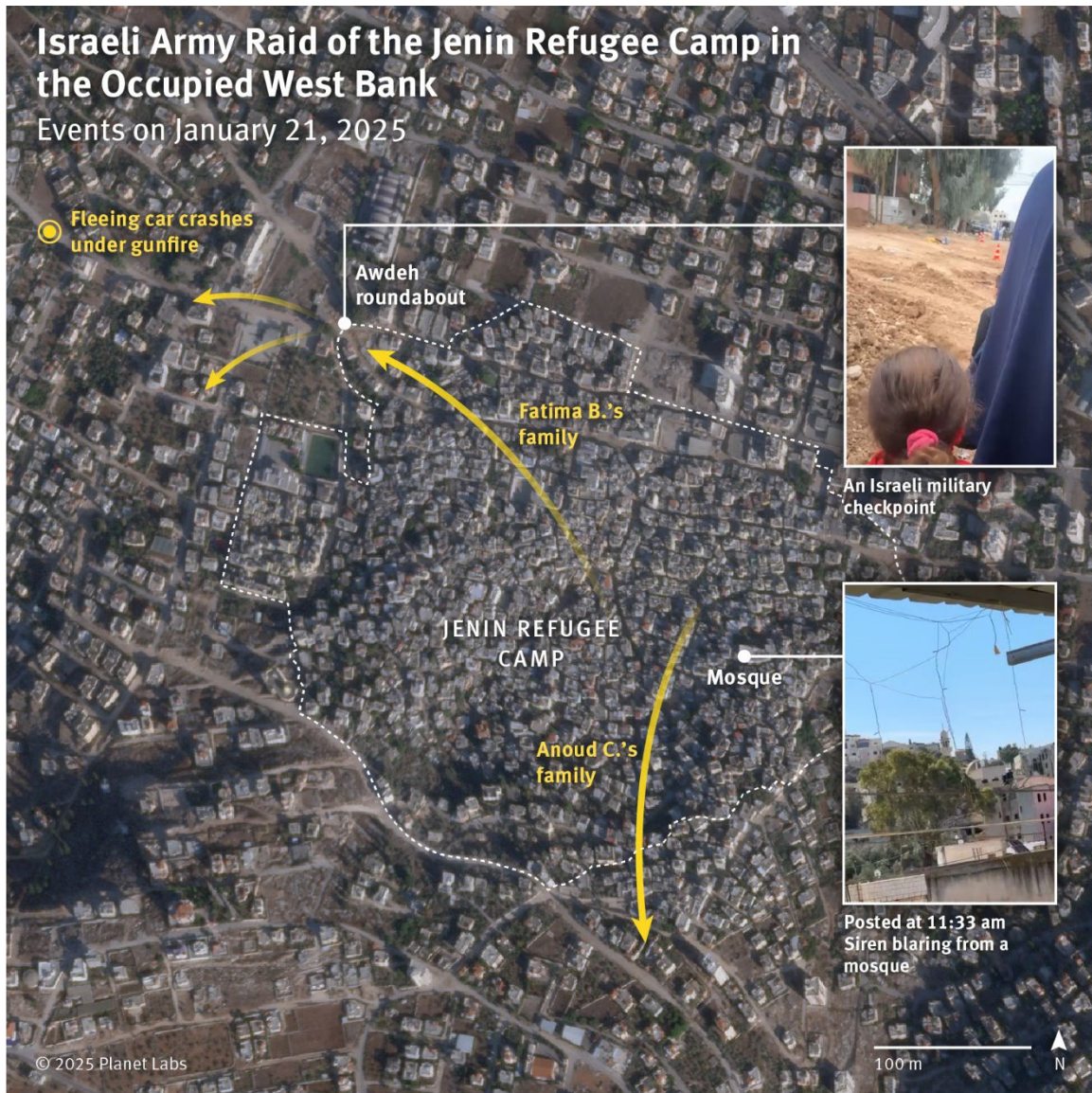
⁴² Kareem Khadder, Eugenia Yosef, et al., "As fighting in Gaza stops, Israel launches major military campaign in West Bank," CNN, January 21, 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/01/21/middleeast/israel-west-bank-operation-intl/index.html> (accessed November 11, 2025).

⁴³ David Gritten and Yolande Knell "Ten Palestinians killed as Israeli forces launch major operation in Jenin," BBC, January 22, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckg750yzdr8o> and "Humanitarian Situation Update #260 – West Bank," OCHA, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/humanitarian-situation-update-260-west-bank-enar> (accessed August 8, 2025).

⁴⁴ Ruth Michaelson, Sufian Taha, Lorenzo Tondo, "Hundreds flee Jenin amid Israel's deepening West Bank crackdown," The Guardian, January 23, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/23/people-flee-jenin-amid-israel-deepening-west-bank-crackdown> (accessed August 8, 2025).

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatima B., West Bank, March 18, 2025.

⁴⁶ أحرار جنين (@a7rarjenin) post to Telegram, January 21, 2025, <https://t.me/a7rarjenin/157103> (accessed September 16, 2025).



Human Rights Watch verified videos taken by camp residents as the Israeli military raided Jenin refugee camp on January 21, 2025; researchers mapped out events, including the killing of a man fleeing in a car, and the movements of families as they fled. Satellite image: November 15, 2024 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. Camp boundaries (2017): Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), accessed on September 5, 2025. Analysis and graphics © 2025 Humna Rights Watch. Video stills © 2025 Users via Telegram

Another video, posted in a different Telegram group used by camp residents, at 12:52 p.m. and analyzed by Human Rights Watch, shows an Apache attack helicopter firing its cannon in the air, reportedly over Jenin camp.⁴⁷ A helicopter can also be heard firing in a video

⁴⁷ عيش الدبابير مخيم جنين (@jeniincamp) post to Telegram, January 21, 2025, <https://t.me/jeniincamp/95910> (accessed September 16, 2025). Researchers could not geolocate because the video only shows sky.

posted at 12:54 p.m. and verified by Human Rights Watch showing family homes and the hills flanking Jenin camp.⁴⁸

Fatima B. and her family fled their home immediately, taking nothing with them.

They followed camp residents who said that announcements had been made via drones flying overhead directing them to leave the camp through Awdeh roundabout. The roundabout was the location of a major intersection on the camp's northwestern edge that Israeli forces had bulldozed months earlier: Fatima B. said:

The drones came at the same time as the airplane. I couldn't exactly make out what the drones were saying but other people told me they were saying to leave. It was so scary – we didn't look up – we heard the sound of the airplane and the sound of the drones, we had our kids with us, we just rushed and were running and trying to take care of our kids.⁴⁹

Fatima B. and her family exited the camp through Awdeh roundabout, where she said Israeli soldiers, had set up an informal checkpoint to run security checks on people as they were leaving. Human Rights Watch verified a video taken in Awdeh roundabout and shared on social media on January 22 showing what Fatima described.⁵⁰

At about the same time Fatima B. was leaving the camp, a silver Kia passenger car carrying fleeing people, including a child, was shot at about 200 meters west of the Awdeh roundabout, as it was traveling in a westward direction away from the camp. A video posted to social media that same day, filmed from inside the vehicle – whose dashboard clock read 1:10 p.m. – showed a man driving with women and a little boy. Multiple shots ring out as the little boy shouts, “Go, go!” in Arabic, and a woman starts praying. She screams, “Oh, God!” before the car swerves and the video cuts out.⁵¹ A second video, filmed from outside the vehicle and shared on social media, shows the Kia speeding along the road before abruptly stopping.⁵² A third video, posted to Telegram at 1:47 p.m., shows

⁴⁸ جنين (@jeniincamp) post to Telegram, January 21, 2025, <https://t.me/jeniincamp/95912> (accessed September 16, 2025).

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatima B., West Bank, March 18, 2025.

⁵⁰ الصحفي أنس حوشية (@anas_hoshia) post to Telegram channel, January 22, 2025, (accessed July 7, 2025).

⁵¹ @a7rarjenin video post to Telegram, January 21, 2025 (accessed July 8, 2025).

⁵² Al Araby Television video post to YouTube, January 21, 2025 (accessed July 8, 2025).

a silver Kia crashed into the side of the road, its doors ajar, and apparent small caliber bullet holes in the windshield. An Israeli military vehicle is visible behind the vehicle as the sound of drones buzz overhead.⁵³

Human Rights Watch verified and geolocated the three videos. The car crashed into a curb on Balat al-Shuhada Street, less than 400 meters from the roundabout. Social media and news reports said the driver, Ahmed Nimer al-Shaib, a resident of Burqin, just southwest of Jenin camp, died trying to flee after picking up his son from school.⁵⁴

Within hours of the raid beginning, Israeli military bulldozers rolled through Jenin,⁵⁵ and began ripping up roads leading to the camp.⁵⁶

Anoud C., a 36-year-old who was undergoing intensive treatment for lung cancer, was at home in the center of Jenin camp with her sisters and their children when the raid began:

It was around noon. ... First, I heard the helicopter, and when we were leaving the house, I saw an Apache [helicopter]. I could hear explosions, there were four explosions first, before the helicopter began to shoot over our heads and at the people.

I was terrified and scared. We were panicking, it all happened so fast. Out of fear we had to leave.⁵⁷

⁵³ @jeniincamp video post to Telegram, January 21, 2025 (accessed July 8, 2025).

⁵⁴ Researchers confirmed Ahmed Nimer al-Shaib's death by comparing the body at his funeral procession to photographs of him alive posted online. @a7rarjenin post to Telegram, January 22, 2025 (accessed July 8, 2025). Additionally, researchers visually confirmed that the boy in the video from inside the car (when it came under fire) is the same boy later interviewed as Ahmed Nimer al-Shaib's son, describing to a journalist how the car came under fire. In both videos, they are wearing the same winter coat. Eman Silawy post to Facebook, January 23, 2025 (accessed July 8, 2025).

⁵⁵ @anas_hoshia video post to Telegram, January 21, 2025, https://t.me/anas_hoshia/54947 (accessed July 9, 2025). Human Rights Watch researchers geolocated a video posted to Telegram that show two Israeli military bulldozers led by two tanks rolling down "Military Street" in Jenin, just north of the camp, towards Jenin camp.

⁵⁶ @anas_hoshia video posts to Telegram, January 21, 2025, https://t.me/anas_hoshia/54948 (accessed July 9, 2025).

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Anoud C., West Bank, March 18, 2025.

Anoud C. with her family fled their house, between al-Damaj, al-Hawasheen, and Faloujeh neighborhoods, holding a white cloth. “We were frightened,” she said. “We didn’t know what to do, we just left the house without anyone asking us to leave.”⁵⁸ She described the scenes of panic and chaos as she and other camp residents tried to escape the violence:

I was not able to take anything with me – just my ID and my purse. When we fled, we saw many people, many camp residents. We saw dead people on the ground. ...The soldiers were wearing different uniforms. When we left the house, near the hospital, we saw tanks and military cars in front of us, rushing into the camp. We stepped aside until they passed us.⁵⁹

Anoud C. sought refuge with her family at the premises of the Society for the Blind, an organization that provides essential services to children and youth who have visual disabilities situated on the southern entrance of Jenin city.

While many families fled their homes in Jenin camp on the first day of the Israeli raid, other camp residents stayed in their homes until Israeli drones with loudspeakers told them to leave.⁶⁰ Sara D., a 65-year-old Jenin camp resident, described what she heard on January 22:

On the second day [of the raid], drones started circulating the camp and ordered people to leave. I didn’t see the drone [that had the loudspeaker], but I heard it – it was ordering us to leave the camp between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. and to go through the Awdeh roundabout. It was saying in Arabic: “Evacuate your home, if you don’t, you will bear the responsibility, we will destroy the camp.” The drone would come to the window and circle around the area, repeating the sentence over again.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Researchers analyzed a video posted to Facebook on February 3, 2025, that show a drone flying above a home, reportedly in Jenin. Researchers could not make out what message the drone, which appeared to be outfitted with loudspeakers, was transmitting. Awdeh Plus+, Facebook video post, February 3, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=536255626190521> (accessed September 16, 2025).

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Sara D., West Bank, March 18, 2025.

She felt confident that the order was coming from the drone, not Israel soldiers nearby:

I'm sure it was a drone because the sound came from high up, it wasn't from a military jeep on the ground. I told my sister-in-law [with me in the house], there's no chance for us to stay and that we had to leave.⁶²

Sara D. fled her home with her sister-in-law and her children, including her adult nephew who uses a wheelchair. She described their flight:

We thought it would be one or two days and then we would come back to the camp and our home. We left with the clothes on us, nothing else, not even my medicine. The situation was very difficult. ...When you have kids and a person with a disability, you only think about them and their safety. Even when we were leaving and heading towards the Awdeh roundabout, the Israeli soldiers [near us] started shooting in the air, I think, to scare us, but we continued walking until we reached the Awdeh roundabout.⁶³

Residents said that they could see drones following and tracking their movements as they fled towards the roundabout.⁶⁴ Sara D. said:

[The Awdeh roundabout] was filled with soldiers, and the Israeli military had set up a checkpoint. I could only cross through it after looking into a camera that scanned my eyes. Soldiers told people to look into the camera and after the scan I saw some people were taken aside.⁶⁵

Human Rights Watch verified a photograph posted to social media and published by Al Jazeera on January 22 showing dozens of men, women, and children gathered on foot at the Awdeh roundabout and walking westward on the ripped-up Balat al-Shuhada Street

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Sara D., West Bank, March 18, 2025, and Nour H., West Bank, June 12, 2025.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Sara D., West Bank, March 18, 2025.

along the Wadi Burqin corridor.⁶⁶ Photographs taken by an Anadolu Agency photographer and published online on January 23, and verified by Human Rights Watch, show dozens of men, women, children, and older people, including people with disabilities, walking along this same destroyed road, many of them struggling while carrying plastic bags or luggage with possessions.⁶⁷ One photograph, taken 100 meters from where Ahmed Nimer al-Shaib was killed in his car, on the same route he took on January 21, shows three women, arm in arm, one of them an older woman hunched over and gripping a cane, as they walk westward from the Awdeh roundabout.



Palestinian families, including an older woman, are forcibly displaced from the Jenin refugee camp in the northern West Bank, walking along Balat al Shuhada road, on January 22, 2025. © 2025 Issam Rimawi/Anadolu via Getty Images

⁶⁶ “Wadi Burqin Corridor – where the residents of Jenin were displaced from” (“ممر وادي برقين.. من هنا نزح أهالي مخيم جنين”), Al Jazeera Arabic, January 22, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2025/1/22/%D9%85%D9%85%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%B2%D8%AD-%D8%A3%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%AE%D9%8A%D9%85> (accessed November 11, 2025).

⁶⁷ “Hundreds of Palestinians flee Jenin camp after Israeli threats of evacuation” (“مئات الفلسطينيين ينزحون من مخيم جنين بعد تهديدات”), Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, January 23, 2025, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/-مخيم-جنين-بعد-تهديدات-إسرائيلية-بالإخلاء> (accessed November 11, 2025).

Sara D.'s family found shelter at the same Society for the Blind school that housed Anoud C. and other displaced families.

The Israeli military systematically expelled the entire population of Jenin refugee camp. Since then, Israeli forces have installed sandbags and military gates at camp entrances, blocking residents from entering.⁶⁸ They patrol in armored vehicles, have bulldozed roads and damaged and demolished infrastructure, converted residential homes into military posts, and hung Israeli flags from some buildings.⁶⁹

Tulkarem Camp Raid

After Israeli military forces raided Jenin, it expanded its campaign to Tulkarem refugee camp on January 27. The Israeli military employed tactics similar to those used in the Jenin raids, deploying ground troops, drones, tanks, and bulldozers to clear the camp of its residents.⁷⁰

On the morning of January 27, residents posted reports of reconnaissance aircraft over Tulkarem camp on Telegram. Leila E., a 54-year-old social worker, was in her home that morning in the northeastern part of the camp, on al-Shahid Taleb Sarouji Street, al-Balawneh neighborhood, with her children and grandchildren, when Israeli military forces entered her street:

It was around noon and we were cooking. ... We knew the Israeli military would be coming. ... [W]e followed the news on a Telegram channel. ... They [the Israeli soldiers] kicked the door and entered – it was about 25 soldiers with a dog – it was terrifying. It was like another Nakba.⁷¹

⁶⁸ "Israeli Forces Block Entrances to Jenin as Deadly Raid Enters Fourth Day," Al Jazeera, January 24, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/1/24/israeli-forces-block-entrances-to-jenin-as-deadly-raid-enters-fourth-day> (accessed August 13, 2025).

⁶⁹ Gerry Shih, Miriam Berger, et al., "As Israel widens war in West Bank, settlers see their influence pay off," Washington Post, March 6, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/03/06/israel-military-west-bank-jenin-tulkarm/> (accessed August 8, 2025); "What is Israel's Operation Iron Wall?" Sky News YouTube. Human Rights Watch, during its visit to the area in June 2025, saw some of this activity and spoke to former residents who also had witnessed this.

⁷⁰ "Israeli army operation in West Bank's Tulkarm 'like a smaller-scale Gaza,'" France24, February 3, 2025, <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20250203-israeli-army-operation-in-west-bank-s-tulkarm-like-a-smaller-scale-gaza> (accessed November 12, 2025).

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Leila E., West Bank, March 26, 2025.

Leila E. described how the Israeli soldiers forced her and her family from their home:

They [Israeli soldiers] were screaming and throwing things everywhere....
No one explained anything, they were just destroying the house, screaming and using bad words. It was like a movie scene – some had masks and they were carrying all kinds of weapons. I could see grenades, and they had big machine guns. ... The soldiers pushed us outside the house. ... [T]hey screamed at us to leave the house. ... One of my girls explained to the soldiers that she needed to get milk and clothes for the kids, but one of the soldiers said, “You don’t have a house here anymore. You need to leave.”⁷²

Once on the street outside her home, Leila E. said she saw Israeli soldiers using two bulldozers. She identified one as an Israeli military Caterpillar D9 bulldozer, and the other she said was used to remove rubble and place it on the side of the road. Her area had already been partially bulldozed weeks earlier.⁷³

Leila E. said that in their rush, her daughter, who was four months pregnant at the time, fell over. She subsequently experienced a miscarriage, an event Leila said she was still mourning when we spoke with her in late March.

By 5 p.m., Israeli forces had stormed the camp from most entrances. Residents updated one another on Telegram in real time, posting photographs and videos later verified by Human Rights Watch.⁷⁴ These include videos showing Israeli soldiers on foot outside of al-Zakat Hospital, southwest of the camp;⁷⁵ a bulldozer ripping up Jamal Abdel Nasser Square leading to the camp, also to the southwest;⁷⁶ military vehicles driving past Tulkarem Governmental Hospital, north of the camp;⁷⁷ and a convoy with a bulldozer driving past

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Palestinian Refugees Portal (بوابة اللاجئين الفلسطينيين), Facebook video post, December 25, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=979042317378461> (accessed November 11, 2025).

⁷⁴ Telegram channels such as @tulkarembaladna10 posted updates, followed by Tulkarem residents, in real time.

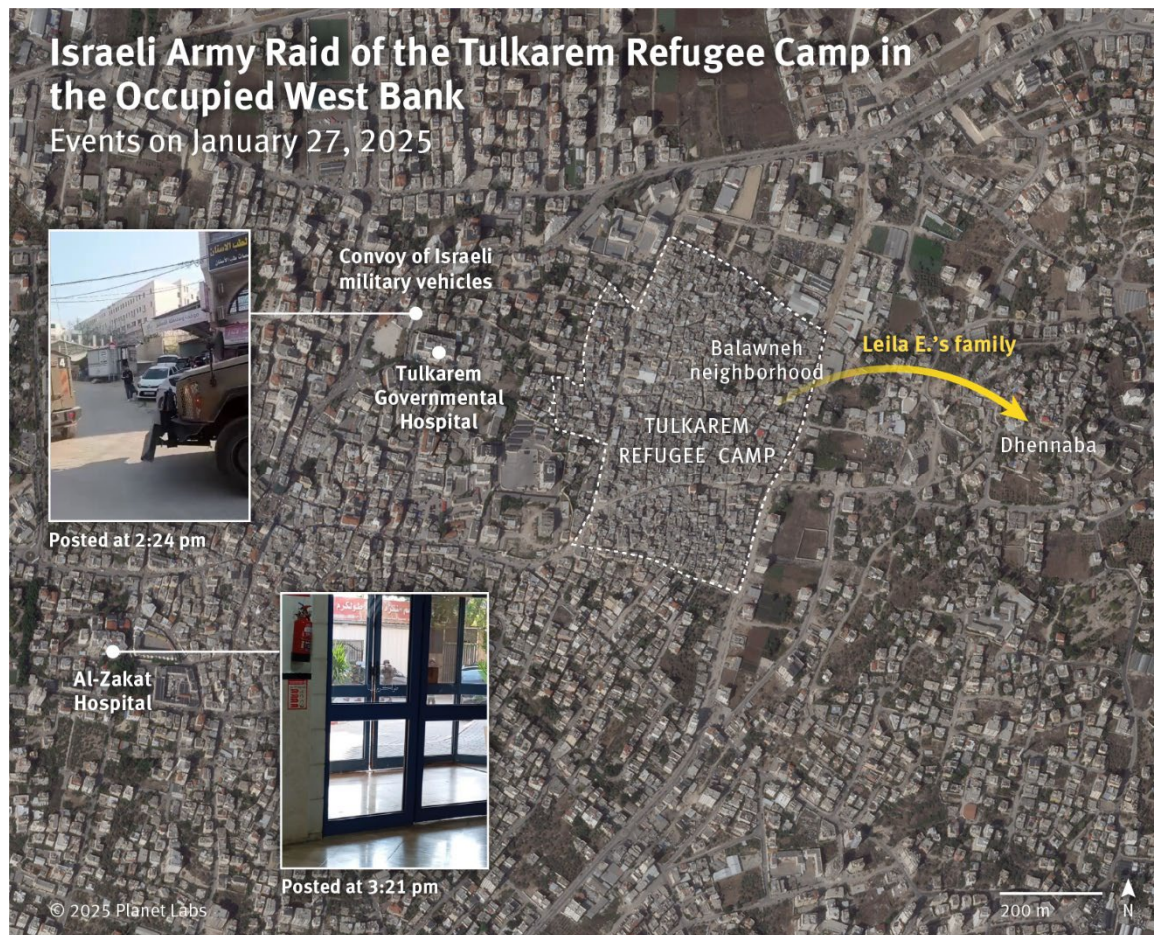
⁷⁵ طولكرم بلدنا (@tulkarembaladna10) post to Telegram, January 27, 2025, <https://t.me/tulkarembaladna10/176340> (accessed June 12, 2025).

⁷⁶ طولكرم بلدنا (@tulkarembaladna10) post to Telegram, January 27, 2025, <https://t.me/tulkarembaladna10/176364> (accessed June 12, 2025).

⁷⁷ طولكرم بلدنا (@tulkarembaladna10) post to Telegram, January 27, 2025, <https://t.me/tulkarembaladna10/176324> (accessed June 12, 2025).

Palestine Technical University-Kadoorie, to the west of the camp.⁷⁸

Leila E. said the Israeli soldiers did not tell them where to go, and when she asked, the soldiers just repeated that they should leave. She and her family made their way on foot east from al-Balawneh, now largely destroyed, to another daughter's home in the nearby village of Dhennaba, in between Tulkarem camp and Nur Shams camp.⁷⁹



Human Rights Watch documented the routes families like Leila E.'s family took to flee Tulkarem refugee camp, and geolocated and verified videos indicating the presence of Israeli forces throughout Tulkarem during the raid on January 27, 2025. Satellite image: October 14, 2024 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. Camp boundaries (2017): Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), accessed on September 5, 2025. Analysis and graphics © 2025 Human Rights Watch. Image and video still © 2025 Users via Telegram

⁷⁸ طولكرم بلدنا (@tulkarembaladna10) post to Telegram, January 27, 2025, <https://t.me/tulkarembaladna10/176350> (accessed June 12, 2025).

⁷⁹ Fajer TV (تلفزيون الفجر), Facebook video post, June 12, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1377401006870672> (accessed September 26, 2025).

As of the end of July 2025, Leila E.'s house was still standing. The row of buildings adjacent to her house were slated for demolition as part of a demolition order issued on May 1. Satellite imagery analysis shows that the street where Leila's house is located has been widened and the destruction caused by the operation expanded to both sides of the street. Human Rights Watch verified a video shared with researchers showing heavy damage to Leila's house along with surrounding buildings.

By the morning of January 28, the main entrance leading to the camp on Nablus Road was torn up, with a gaping crater in the ground in place of pavement, along with other landmarks in and around the camp.⁸⁰



An older Palestinian man stands in the middle of a destroyed market in Tulkarem in the northern West Bank, January 28, 2025. © 2025 Nasser Ishtayeh/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

⁸⁰ تلفزيون المدينة (Al Medina Radio & TV), Facebook post, January 28, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/almadina.tvps/posts/pfbidoyE6VMvawpAGc4pPQonr78kdJvRp2SX3p3ocWduXSQbkdWDnJxH8EJnnPwMT3sHpsl> (accessed July 29, 2025).

Some residents said they were forced to leave their homes several days after the raids on Tulkarem began. They said that Israeli military forces were clearing people from the camp, area by area, during that time. “They [Israeli soldiers] came to the street on February 1 at 11 a.m. and started shooting,” said Yusuf F., a 40-year-old man from Tulkarem refugee camp who uses a wheelchair.⁸¹ He said he was terrified, and together with the rest of his family – some 20 members – gathered on the ground floor of the three-story building where they were living on Schools Street in the northwest of Tulkarem camp:

The Israeli soldiers were shooting everywhere, the bullets were entering the walls and doors around us. ...They were screaming, and using bad words. ... After the shooting stopped, they ordered us to go outside. They split up the men and women and put all the men against a wall for 30 minutes and made us take off all our clothes and strip-searched us. I am paralyzed, so my brother had to help me. Then they ordered us to leave.⁸²

Yusuf F. said that the soldiers would not let him take his electric wheelchair, allowing him only to bring his manual wheelchair with him, which he is not comfortable using.⁸³ The bulldozed street and surrounding area, which was no longer paved, instead was now a dirt path with mounds of earth on either side, making it difficult to navigate for people who use assistive devices such as wheelchairs and walkers.

People with physical disabilities had to rely on family and neighbors to assist them through streets damaged by Israeli bulldozers, or to physically carry them to safety. In a video and series of photographs posted on Telegram on January 28 and verified by Human Rights Watch, at least seven older people with mobility aids and assistive devices can be seen struggling to exit the camp, making their way past mounds of earth and jagged metal where buildings once stood. Drones are audible in the video. In one photograph, a shoeless older man in a mud-caked wheelchair sits on the side of a destroyed road.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Yusuf F., West Bank, March 25, 2025.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ طولكرم بلدنا (@tulkarembaladna10), post to Telegram channel, January 28, 2025, <https://t.me/tulkarembaladna10/176471> (accessed September 26, 2025); طولكرم بلدنا (@tulkarembaladna10), post to Telegram channel, January 28, 2025, <https://t.me/tulkarembaladna10/176469> (accessed September 26, 2025).



An older man in a wheelchair on a bulldozed street as Israeli forces forcibly displace residents from Tulkarem refugee camp in the northern West Bank, on January 28. @PalPostN

Yusuf F. said:

The street is not easy for me to use without my electric wheelchair. ... So my neighbor picked me up and carried me out of the street... When the Israeli soldiers told us to leave the area... a lot of people were asking where we should go, and when could we come back, but the soldiers didn't answer. The only instruction they gave us was to leave the camp from near the school and then leave the area and don't come back. ... There were a lot of drones in the sky that day – we could see them clearly.⁸⁵

Yusuf F. and his family sought shelter in a small sports club outside the camp. He then moved to a school where he used to work before taking out a loan to rent a place where he and his wife could live.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Yusuf F., West Bank, March 25, 2025.

By late March 2025, all the residents of Tulkarem camp had been forced to nearby areas, leaving the camp empty. Its entrances were sealed, and soldiers patrolled with military vehicles and raised Israeli flags outside of some buildings in the refugee camp.⁸⁶

Nur Shams Camp Raid

On February 9, Israeli military forces began operations against Nur Shams refugee camp, which lies east of Tulkarem camp and along the main road that connects Tulkarem to the city of Nablus.⁸⁷



A group of women and children encounter two Israeli soldiers on the northwest edge of Nur Shams refugee camp in the northern West Bank, near Nablus Street, one of whom is seen with their weapon raised, on February 9, 2025 as the Israeli army forcibly displace the camp's residents. The soldiers shot in the air, the photographer who took the photograph told Human Rights Watch. © 2025 Wahaj Bani Moufleh

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch site visit, Tulkarem, June 2025.

⁸⁷ "Amid deadly raids, Israeli army orders evacuation of another West Bank camp," Al Jazeera, February 12, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/12/israeli-military-orders-evacuation-of-west-banks-nur-shams-camp> (accessed November 12, 2025).

Israel military forces, in operations similar to those used to empty Tulkarem camp, entered Nur Shams area by area, forcing residents to leave, using military vehicles, drones and ground forces.

Just before 2 a.m. on February 9, and later in the morning, reports surfaced on local Telegram groups of reconnaissance drones above the camp, Israeli military vehicles spotted in numerous neighborhoods, and subsequent raids on homes.⁸⁸

A video posted to Telegram at 4:54 a.m. that morning and analyzed by Human Rights Watch shows women, men, and small children walking past one of the many greenhouses in the south of the camp, on a pitch-black road.⁸⁹ “They didn’t allow us to go through there [a road leading to a mosque in Tulkarem]; they sent us through Kafr al-Labad Road,” says one of the men, holding a child’s hand, referring to a road running east of the camp.⁹⁰

Nadine G., a 53-year-old woman who used to manage a center for people with disabilities in Nur Shams, was in her house with her husband and 14-year-old daughter in the “Schools neighborhood” on the southern edge of the camp when the raids began early on February 9:

I saw on the Telegram news channel that the Israeli military had started storming Nur Shams. That’s how I first learned that the raids here had started. One hour after this, the soldiers were in front of my house. I started to hear the sounds of bulldozers and “tiger jeeps,” a kind of military jeep.⁹¹

Nadine G. said she then heard bullets around her house. She read reports on social media that Israeli forces had shot and killed her neighbor, Sundos Shalabi, 23, who was eight-months’ pregnant at the time. Social media reported that Israeli forces killed Shalabi in the early morning as she fled their neighborhood by car.

⁸⁸ Nur Shams (@noursams) post to Telegram channel, February 9, 2025, <https://t.me/noursams/71692> (accessed August 20, 2025); Nur Shams (@noursams) post to Telegram channel, February 9, 2025, <https://t.me/noursams/71597> (accessed August 20, 2025); Nur Shams (@noursams) post to Telegram channel, February 9, 2025, <https://t.me/noursams/71600> (accessed August 20, 2025).

⁸⁹ Nur Shams (@noursams) post to Telegram channel, February 9, 2025, <https://t.me/noursams/71652> (accessed August 20, 2025).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nadine G., West Bank, June 11, 2025.

Human Rights Watch geolocated a photograph of Shalabi's gravely injured husband⁹² in a car next to a greenhouse about 200 meters south of the "Schools neighborhood," in addition to another image shared on social media showing a different angle of the car around sunrise.⁹³ Shalabi's husband, Yazan, survived with life-altering injuries that led to a disability including partial paralysis, requiring him to use a wheelchair. Researchers geolocated an image of Shalabi's body slumped on the ground close to the car.⁹⁴

An investigation by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem quoted Bilal Abu Shu'lah, Shalabi's 19-year-old brother-in-law who was with her just before her killing. "The last time I saw her, when we were near the car and the [Israeli] soldiers took me, she wasn't injured at all," he said.⁹⁵

Shalabi had called her father-in-law's cell phone around 3:30 a.m. that morning in distress, according to Shalabi's mother-in-law, Umm Bilal.⁹⁶

"[My husband] put her on loudspeaker, and I told her to knock on doors and see who could help," Shalabi's mother-in-law told Human Rights Watch. "I was on the phone with her



Sundos Shalabi, shot in the back and pelvis and killed by the Israeli military on February 9, 2025, smiles in an undated photograph. She was 8 months pregnant when she was killed. © Private

⁹² Photograph shared with researchers, on file with Human Rights Watch.

⁹³ طولكرم بلدنا (@tulkarembaladna10) post to Telegram channel, February 9, 2025, <https://t.me/tulkarembaladna10/177912> (accessed August 20, 2025). A sunrise is visible in one of the photographs showing the crashed car. Researchers established that sunrise in Nur Shams on February 9, 2025, was between 6:00 and 6:30 a.m., meaning the incident must have occurred before sunrise.

⁹⁴ Photograph, shared with researchers, on file with Human Rights Watch.

⁹⁵ "Soldiers kill two women, one of them pregnant, and use man as human shield in Balata Refugee Camp," B'Tselem, May 18, 2025, https://www.btselem.org/firearms/20250518_soldiers_kill_two_women_one_of_them_pregnant_and_use_man_as_human_shield_in_balata_refugee_camp (accessed August 8, 2025).

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Um Bilal, West Bank, September 29, 2025.

calming her down, she told me not to leave her alone. I even heard her knocking on the door while on the phone with me. ...She kept telling me, ‘Don’t leave me,’ and telling me she saw Yazan bleeding. Then suddenly we heard a gasp. Sundos said, ‘Akh, akh,’ twice. Then she went silent.”⁹⁷

A report by the Israeli newspaper Haaretz that cited a preliminary Israeli military investigation reported that Shalabi was unarmed, saying she had “looked suspiciously at the ground” and was “shot three times in the chest.”⁹⁸

Human Rights Watch analyzed hospital autopsy and medical reports, which said Shalabi was shot in the back and pelvis, killing her and her fetus, as well as CT scans that clearly show the trajectory of the bullets. According to the Independent Forensic Expert Group, which was consulted by Human Rights Watch and reviewed the hospital reports and CT scans of her wounds, Shalabi was shot at least twice, with the bullets striking her in the upper back and the back pelvis region, shattering her spine.⁹⁹

In response to questions about the killing of Shalabi, the Israeli military’s International Press Desk said:

[A] Military Police investigation has been opened. Upon its completion, the findings will be transferred to the Military Advocate General’s Office for review. Naturally, we cannot provide details on an ongoing investigation.¹⁰⁰

Just over 200 meters to the north, Nadine G. hid with her husband and daughter in her daughter’s room for 72 hours:

I could see the Israeli soldiers and two bulldozers, D9 bulldozers, destroying the wall of my garden while we were hiding. There were drones circling – we could hear the sounds of destruction. We stayed three days

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Yaniv Kubovich, “Israeli Army Expands Open-fire Orders in West Bank, Leading to Surge in Palestinian Civilian Deaths,” February 10, 2025, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-02-10/ty-article/.premium/israeli-army-expands-open-fire-orders-leading-to-surge-in-palestinian-civilian-deaths/00000194-ef85-dd03-add7-ffc72f120000> (accessed September 3, 2025).

⁹⁹ Medical reports and CT scans on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁰⁰ See Annex.

inside that room and we were so scared. I didn't want to leave. We didn't have electricity... and the soldiers never tried to communicate with us.¹⁰¹

At 6 a.m. on February 9, Medina TV posted on Facebook saying that the Israeli military had forced camp residents of nearby Jabal Saleheen, a neighborhood on the eastern edge of the camp, out of their homes, and turned them into military barracks.¹⁰² Israeli military bulldozers and excavators tore through the camp: A video posted to X on February 10 and verified by Human Rights Watch shows D9 bulldozers ripping through a street in Jabal Saleheen, destroying a house's wall and flipping a car.¹⁰³

Nadine G. said she eventually left her house when one of her neighbors came to tell her that the soldiers had ordered people to leave the camp. She packed three bags for her and her family and followed the directions of the Israeli soldiers who were outside her house:

The soldiers told us to use a particular road to exit the camp. I couldn't recognize the camp... the houses had been destroyed, and there were destroyed cables. There was fuel mixed with water on the ground and we were forced to walk on this. There were more than 40 men, and maybe 45 women with their children walking with us at the same time from my neighborhood. As we were walking, drones were following us overhead and there were maybe 20 to 25 soldiers, aiming guns at us. They were wearing dark green uniforms. They were telling us which route to take. We were meeting women along the way who had also been forced to leave and they were all crying.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nadine G., West Bank, June 11, 2025.

¹⁰² تلفزيون المدينة (@almadina.tv), Facebook post, February 8, 2025,

https://www.facebook.com/almadina.tvps/posts/%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%8A%D9%8F%D8%AC%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%AE%D9%8A%D9%85-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%B3-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AC-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86/1012402697589403/?locale=ar_AR (accessed October 20, 2025).

¹⁰³ @NemoAnno first geolocated the video, posted to X on February 10, 2025. Anno Nemo (@NemoAnno), posted to X, February 10, 2025, <https://x.com/NemoAnno/status/1889043720084885784>. Human Rights Watch researchers confirmed the geolocation.

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Nadine G., West Bank, June 11, 2025.

Once she reached the main entrance of the camp, Nadine G. said that Israeli soldiers had taken over a building and installed a makeshift checkpoint and were checking people's IDs as they left the camp. The soldiers checked her ID and allowed her and her daughter to leave but detained her 75-year-old husband for a few hours before releasing him. She said she found shelter in a hotel run by relatives sharing one room with her husband and daughter. "All my dreams have been erased," she said.¹⁰⁵

Nour H., a 36-year-old woman with five children, was at home with her family in the Mansheeya neighborhood, in the northeast of Nur Shams camp, on February 9 when the raids began:

I knew on February 9 that the raid on Nur Shams had begun, as I was following the news on social media. In the early hours of February 10, we didn't have internet anymore to check the news, but I could hear the bulldozers and I could hear their [Israeli soldiers'] voices yelling and I could hear the sounds of destruction. At 6 a.m., the Israeli military started shooting at our house wall, and at 7:30 a.m. a drone smashed through one of the windows and the kids started crying. Then an Israeli soldier told my brother who was living on the first floor to gather everyone in the building on the first floor. All of the Israeli soldiers were holding weapons and there were more than 100 of them there throughout the building.¹⁰⁶

Nour H. said that the Israeli soldiers took her brother-in-law away and she suspected that he would be detained but later found out that he had been ordered to go to other homes and instruct people to leave the camp¹⁰⁷ – actions that may amount to using a civilian as a human shield. "Human shielding" is purposefully using the presence of civilians to shield military objectives or operations from attack, and is a violation of the laws of war and constitutes a war crime.¹⁰⁸ Nour H. said that she and 17 relatives spent approximately 11

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Nour H., West Bank, June 12, 2025.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Nour H., West Bank, June 12, 2025.

¹⁰⁸ ICRC, "Rule 97. Human Shields," ICRC Customary IHL Database, undated, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule97> and "Rule 156. Definition of War Crimes," citing Fourth Geneva Convention, article 28, ICRC Customary IHL Database, undated, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule156> (accessed November 11, 2025).

hours waiting in one room of their home under Israeli instructions. After 11 hours, her brother-in-law returned and said they had 10 minutes to leave the camp:

I asked the soldiers where we should go and they said to the east, and they told us if you go to the left or to the right you will be targeted by snipers who are in high places around the area. When we left, there was a drone above us and it followed us from Malabe neighborhood to Ghazal mall, all the way.¹⁰⁹

Nour H. fled east with her family to her parents' house outside the camp area.

Abdallah al-Ashqar, a 51-year-old father of seven, was at home with his family on February 9, just next door to the UNRWA Nur Shams Boys' School, in the "Schools neighborhood," when he heard that Israeli military forces had started to raid the camp. Al-Ashqar had been following the news on Telegram, and at 3 a.m. he learned that Israeli forces were in Dhennaba village between Tulkarem camp and Nur Shams. He had seen Telegram posts from people saying they expected Nur Shams would be raided next. His family prepared themselves and made sure they had their IDs and documentation with them. At 10:30 a.m. that day, his 21-year-old daughter, Rahaf, said that she could see soldiers encircling their home. Al-Ashqar said Rahaf went back and forth between the windows in different bedrooms and the main entrance describing what the soldiers were doing:

After this all back and forth, she went to the main door in the house and she said, "Dad, our garden door is open." She pointed to two poles around the house with wires around them, and said it looked like the Israeli soldiers were setting up to bomb something. When Rahaf was showing me this, she was on top of the couch, and then the bombing happened. ...The soldiers blew up the door. ...

I was closer to the door than Rahaf – she jumped and then was in front of me. I was looking at Rahaf and I saw a white spark, and there was a big loud boom. Rahaf was pushed right back and fell to the floor and shouted,

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nour H., West Bank, June 12, 2025.

“Help me.” I was crawling to her, and I heard her take her last breath. Her mum screamed.

They could have warned us, with speakers or something... but they didn’t do anything.¹¹⁰

Rahaf died in the attack. Al-Ashqar suffered injuries in his legs from shrapnel: “There was broken metal and glass everywhere.”¹¹¹ He said that the soldiers then entered his home:

I had been thrown to the ground and then two soldiers broke into the house. They checked Rahaf’s pulse to see if she was breathing and that was it. They ignored me, even as I was bleeding. ...

After a while, many soldiers came, maybe dozens, and they were asking, “Where are the weapons?” I was looking at them, ransacking our rooms, our washing machine, all our clothes.¹¹²

In response to Human Rights Watch questions regarding the killing of Rahaf during the attack, the Israeli military’s International Press Desk said:

In connection with the case of Rahaf al-Ashkar, forces were preparing to arrest a wanted terrorist known to the security system and residing in Nur al-Shams, within the jurisdiction of the Ephraim Brigade.

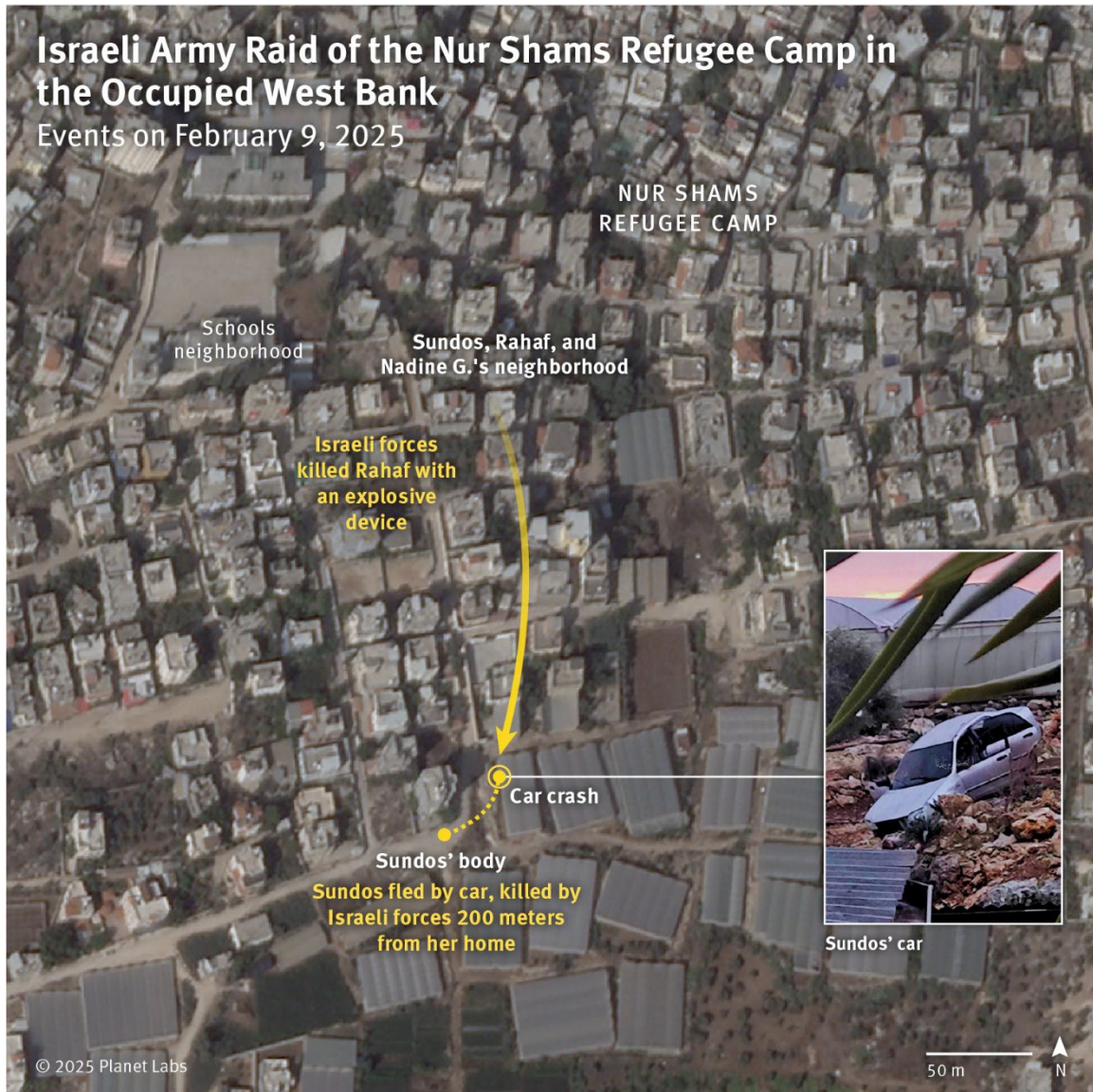
The forces called on the residents of the house to come out in order to arrest the suspect. When they did not respond, the forces were compelled to breach the door using explosives. As a result of the breach, a woman in the house was injured. The forces coordinated the rapid arrival of the Red Crescent to treat her.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdallah al-Ashqar, West Bank, June 11, 2025.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ See Annex.



Human Rights Watch geolocated Sundos, Rahaf and Nadine G's homes, and mapped out their movements and events detailed in interviews. Researchers verified photographs and videos related to the killings of Rahaf and Sundos by Israeli forces during the raid on Nur Shams refugee camp on February 9, 2025. Satellite image: October 14, 2024 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. Camp boundaries (2017): Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), accessed on September 5, 2025. Analysis and graphics © 2025 Human Rights Watch. Image and video still © 2025 Users via Telegram

Israeli forces detained al-Ashqar's brother during the raid. At the time of Human Rights Watch's interview in June, he remained in administrative detention without trial or charge. When the soldiers left, they told al-Ashqar's family to call the paramedics, who took 30 minutes to arrive due to blocked roads. Once the makeshift ambulance took them both

away, al-Ashqar's wife and family also fled the camp, later collecting Rahaf's body from the morgue.

Following the killing of Rahaf and media coverage of the incident, including by Haaretz,¹¹⁴ the Israeli military announced they would launch an investigation into her death.¹¹⁵ At the time of writing, the Israeli government has provided no further public information on this investigation apart from the information provided to Human Rights Watch, cited above.



Rahaf al-Ashqar's mother touches a portrait of her daughter, June 2025, next to the bird she loved. Rahaf was killed by an explosive device detonated by the Israeli military in front of her home on February 9, 2025.

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¹¹⁴ Gideon Levy and Alex Levac, "Israeli Troops Blew Up a Palestinian Home's Door. A Young Woman Paid with Her Life," Haaretz, March 22, 2025, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/twilight-zone/2025-03-22/ty-article-magazine/.premium/israeli-troops-blew-up-a-palestinian-homes-door-a-young-woman-paid-with-her-life/00000195-bc67-d093-afd7-be6f86b80000> (accessed August 8, 2025).

¹¹⁵ Emanuel Fabian, "IDF military police opens probe into reported killing of two Palestinian women in West Bank," Times of Israel, February 9, 2025, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/idf-military-police-opens-probe-into-reported-killing-of-two-palestinian-women-in-west-bank/ (accessed August 8, 2025).

Local news sources reported that half of Nur Shams' residents were displaced by February 10, with the rest of the camp later emptied and its population displaced across the surrounding areas.¹¹⁶ Similar to the Jenin and Tulkarem camps, Israeli forces sealed off the Nur Shams camp entrances, and soldiers and military vehicles patrolled the camp.

On February 23, Defense Minister Katz announced that the refugee camps had been emptied of their residents.¹¹⁷



An Israeli flag hangs from a Palestinian building in Nur Shams refugee camp in the northern West Bank on July 23, 2025. © 2025 Photo by Sally Hayden/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

¹¹⁶ "Mass Displacement and Widespread Destruction as Israeli Raids Escalate in Nur Shams and Al-Far'a Camps," Palestine News Network (PNN), February 10, 2025, <https://english.pnn.ps/news/47339> (accessed August 8, 2025).

¹¹⁷ Daniel Lavelle, Yohannes Lowe, Christine Kearney, "Middle East Crisis Live: IDF instructed to remain in some West Bank refugee camps for 'the coming year,'" The Guardian, February 23, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2025/feb/23/middle-east-crisis-live-funeral-hezbollah-leader-nasrallah-palestinians-release-israel-gaza> (accessed August 8, 2025).

Conditions of Displacement

We need help, no one is helping us.

– Anoud C., displaced from Jenin refugee camp, March 18, 2025

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, a condition for an evacuation to be lawful is for the occupying power to put in place measures to ensure the “hygiene, health, safety and nutrition” of the displaced population.¹¹⁸ The Israeli military did not provide displaced people from Jenin, Tulkarem, or Nur Shams refugee camps with shelter or humanitarian or medical assistance, or instruct them on where they could obtain such shelter or assistance. Israeli authorities forcibly removed camp residents from their homes amid active aerial fire, raids, and demolitions, and then left them on their own without any assistance.

A Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) report, “Five Months Under Iron Wall,” published in July 2025, found that “people are facing deteriorating health and living conditions, as the Israeli forces continue to cause widespread destruction and occupy the three refugee camps of Jenin, Tulkarem and Nur Shams, preventing any return and barring access.”¹¹⁹

Israel is obligated under international law to ensure that the humanitarian needs of displaced people are met. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 2025 commentary on article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention provides that “transfers and evacuations must be carried out in humane conditions, evacuees must be received in proper accommodation, and members of the same family must not be separated.”¹²⁰

Israel has made no apparent effort to comply with these obligations and has instead increased restrictions on movement across the West Bank, frustrating access by

¹¹⁸ ICRC, Geneva Convention IV (1949), art. 49(3). Rule 131 of the ICRC Study on Customary International Humanitarian Law provides: “In case of displacement, all possible measures must be taken in order that the civilians concerned are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition and that members of the same family are not separated.” See ICRC, “Rule 131: Treatment of Displaced Persons,” International Humanitarian Law Databases, undated, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule131> (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹¹⁹ “Five months after start of Israeli military operation, humanitarian needs escalate in the West Bank,” Médecins Sans Frontières press release, July 1, 2025, <https://www.msf.org/humanitarian-needs-west-bank-five-months-after-israeli-military-operation> (accessed August 8, 2025).

¹²⁰ ICRC, Protecting Civilians in Good Faith: The Updated Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention (“Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention (2025)”), October 22, 2025, <https://www.icrc.org/en/article/updated-commentary-fourth-geneva-convention> (accessed November 11, 2025), art. 49, para. 3209.

humanitarian agencies to the displaced population.¹²¹ A May 2025 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) update found that the majority of “road gates and partial checkpoints” that Israeli authorities installed in the West Bank between December 2024 and February 2025 were erected between mid-January and February 2025, “coinciding with the announcement of the Gaza ceasefire and the onset of the Israeli forces’ operation in the northern West Bank.”¹²² These obstacles “control and restrict the freedom of movement of Palestinians, impede access to livelihoods, healthcare, education and other essential services, entrench territorial and social fragmentation and contribute to worsening humanitarian conditions.”¹²³

All the camp residents interviewed expressed difficulty supporting themselves with limited access to humanitarian services after their displacement from the camps. Many had expected to return after a few days, but Israeli authorities largely prevented from doing so or, in the limited cases where they were permitted to return, were allowed to do so only long enough to retrieve their belongings.

After Fatima B. fled her home amid aerial fire and shootings, she and her family sought refuge at a friend’s home:

We stayed in our friend’s house for two months. The situation was so hard, we cannot stay six people in one room. We started feeling the burden of being with another family. We started looking for a house to rent, but we didn’t have the money. In the end, we found an abandoned house, there were no windows or doors, but the man who owns the place knew we didn’t have money so he gave us the place “on loan” until my husband can find a job. Now we’ve been here for three months, and we owe him a lot of money.¹²⁴

¹²¹ “Humanitarian Situation Update #260 — West Bank,” OCHA, January 30, 2025, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/humanitarian-situation-update-260-west-bank-enar> (accessed August 8, 2025).

¹²² “Movement and Access Update in the West Bank | May 2025,” OCHA, May 27, 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/movement-and-access-update-west-bank-may-2025> (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatima B., West Bank, March 18, 2025.

When Anoud C. fled Jenin refugee camp, she went directly to the Society for the Blind in Jenin city.¹²⁵ She described how she relied on help from the local community:

Our community and the school helped us: the Society provided us with what we needed to sleep, eat, and clean. People also donated clothes for the children...and when Ramadan started, the community kitchen opened and all the families here cooked together. ...There's not much privacy here. You know, mentally, there's a lump in my heart.¹²⁶

After three months sheltering at the school, Anoud C. said that she had to leave and find accommodation elsewhere. "I can't live in one room in housing for students," she said. "I can't live there, I have lung cancer. I need to smell the air."¹²⁷

Rima J., a 46-year-old public service employee who lived in Jenin refugee camp, was at work at the Ibn Sina hospital when Israeli forces began their military operations in Jenin refugee camp. She hid inside the hospital for two days with her sister, brother, and aunt, as her aunt had just recently been a patient with a room at the hospital. There were no humanitarian provisions at the hospital. When they realized they could not go back to their home in the camp, she and her family went to the Jenin Charitable Society:

We stayed in the warehouse at the Jenin Charitable Society. We cleaned it and stayed there until one week before Ramadan and then moved to the kindergarten section at the Society. ...

The worst feeling was when Ramadan started. It was a sad and horrible situation. Here, it is sad and depressing. The feeling is indescribable. ...They [the Israeli military] destroyed our homes...they left nothing for us.¹²⁸

At the time of writing Rima J. and her family are still living at the Jenin Charitable Society.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Anoud C., West Bank, March 18, 2025. The Blind Rehabilitation Care Society, situated in the city of Jenin, provides essential services tailored to blind children and youth, as well as young individuals with other disabilities.

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Anoud C., West Bank, March 18, 2025.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Rima J., West Bank, March 19, 2025.

After Leila E. was forced to leave her home in Tulkarem refugee camp, she stayed with her daughter in her home in Dhennaba:

Her house is near the camp and near two new [Israeli] army bases.... It was an awful time. We stayed there for four months...We were 13 people in two bedrooms, with kids. We didn't have enough space, we couldn't open the windows. There were no mattresses or covers. We tried to sit next to each other for body heat, to help us with the cold.¹²⁹

After four months, the Israeli military forced Leila and her family from her daughter's home, and she was displaced another time:

The [Israeli] army came to the house and told us you have 30 minutes to leave...We took whatever we could. We didn't have a place to go to. We used up all our money in those first four months. ... My daughter's friend found a house for us. It is on the fourth floor and we have no lift. ... We have to think of the rent though, how to pay for the electricity and the water and we don't have clothes for the kids. We had to go to the mosques to ask if there are clothes there, the community leaves clothes in the mosque for people who need them.¹³⁰

MSF's July 2025 report found that nearly half of the 300 people they interviewed were "forcibly displaced three or more times in four months, while nearly three out of four are unsure if they can stay where they currently are."¹³¹

While some residents interviewed said they had received small amounts of cash assistance from humanitarian organizations, most had not received any humanitarian assistance apart from donations from members of the local community. MSF found that "over 47% of respondents reported inconsistent or no access to food and water," and "access to healthcare has been severely disrupted by the closure of the camps, [and] the shutdown of

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Leila E., West Bank, March 26, 2025.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ "Five months after start of Israeli military operation, humanitarian needs escalate in the West Bank," Médecins Sans Frontières press release, July 1, 2025, <https://www.msf.org/humanitarian-needs-west-bank-five-months-after-israeli-military-operation> (accessed August 8, 2025).

all UNRWA centers inside them.”¹³² The director of the Palestinian Women’s Development Center in Tulkarem told Human Rights Watch that they:

[O]rganized collecting clothes, blankets, and necessities for women. ... In the beginning, the situation was a catastrophe. We were distributing winter and summer clothes, food packages and baskets. But this doesn’t cover all the people’s needs. We’re talking about 26,000 people displaced in both camps [in Tulkarem], so that’s a huge number. All our efforts won’t really cover the real needs of people, and the situation is worsening.¹³³

The Israeli authorities carried out a mass forcible displacement of people to areas where their humanitarian needs have not been met. They did not prepare any infrastructure to provide goods and services essential to ensure their human rights and made it difficult for humanitarian agencies to carry out their life-saving services through the proliferation and increase in obstacles on freedom of movement across the West Bank, such as ad hoc checkpoints and road closures.

The longstanding closure of the camps prevented 4,000 students at 10 UNRWA-run primary schools from returning to their classrooms at the start of the 2025-26 academic year, the agency reported on September 1. UNRWA tried to support the children with remote learning, self-learning materials, and temporary learning spaces.¹³⁴

While the obligation in article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention is for the occupying power to provide safeguards “to the greatest practicable extent” for the evacuated population, the ICRC 2025 commentary notes that “evacuation is a temporary and provisional measure that must not last longer than required. The obligation to transfer evacuees back to their homes must be complied with ‘as soon as’ hostilities in the area in question have ceased.”¹³⁵ Nearly

¹³² Five Months under Iron Wall: The Human Toll of Prolonged Displacement & Territorial Fragmentation in the West Bank, Médecins Sans Frontières, July 1, 2025, https://www.msf.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/202506_Briefing_Note_Iron_Wall_5_Months_After%201.pdf (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Director of Palestinian Women’s Development Center, West Bank, March 26, 2025.

¹³⁴ “UNRWA statement on return to schools in the occupied West Bank,” UNRWA news release, September 1, 2025, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-statement-return-schools-occupied-west-bank> (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹³⁵ ICRC, Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention (2025), art. 49, para. 3202.

a year since the start of Operation Iron Wall, there has been no sign of an Israeli government effort to meet the needs of the forcibly displaced population.

Right to Return

My grandfather is a refugee, my father is a refugee, and now my son, they're calling him a displaced person. They are eliminating our roots.

– Leila E., displaced from Tulkarem camp, March 26, 2025

Under the laws of war, Israel must ensure that displaced people are transferred back to their homes as soon as “hostilities in the area in question have ceased.”¹³⁶ The Israeli military should be facilitating voluntary return once the reasons for the evacuation no longer exist, and this return should be carried out safely and with dignity. Officials should not be taking actions that render return impossible. In the meantime, other suitable housing should be made as soon as possible to allow their return.¹³⁷

International human rights law also guarantees that all people who have been forcibly displaced have the right to return to their homes. Under principle 28 of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which are considered to “reflect and are consistent with international human rights law and international humanitarian law:”¹³⁸

Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. Such authorities shall endeavour to facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled internally displaced persons.¹³⁹

On February 23, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz announced that the Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams refugee camps had been emptied of their residents.¹⁴⁰ The Israeli

¹³⁶ ICRC, Geneva Convention IV (1949), art. 49(2).

¹³⁷ ICRC, Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention (2025), art. 49, para. 3205.

¹³⁸ ICRC, “Introduction: Scope and Purpose,” UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc_324-1.pdf (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹³⁹ ICRC, UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, principle 28.

¹⁴⁰ “Middle East Crisis Live: IDF instructed to remain in some West Bank refugee camps for ‘the coming year,’” The Guardian, February 23, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2025/feb/23/middle-east-crisis-live-funeral-hezbollah-leader-nasrallah-palestinians-release-israel-gaza> (accessed August 8, 2025).

authorities had blocked entrances to all three camps and stationed soldiers inside them. After securing full control, Israeli forces carried out controlled demolitions, methodically bulldozed and razed buildings across all three camps, including hundreds of homes, and fired on some camp residents who tried to return.¹⁴¹

Human Rights Watch satellite imagery analysis confirmed widespread destruction across the camps, with approximately 850 buildings destroyed or heavily damaged by the Israeli military by the end of July.¹⁴² Many of these demolitions took place long after the camps were emptied.

The military's actions demonstrate an intent to go beyond what was militarily necessary and to systematically destroy parts of the refugee camps, permanently changing some areas, and frustrating the residents' right to return to their homes. Camp residents said they had no idea if or when they would be allowed to return or whether their houses still exist, with Defense Minister Katz instead stating that he had instructed Israeli military forces "to prepare for a long stay in the camps that were cleared, for the coming year, and not allow residents to return."¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Emma Graham-Harrison and Sufian Taha, "Family mourns grandfather's death as Israel brings Gaza tactics to West Bank," *The Guardian*, February 26, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/26/family-mourns-grandfathers-death-as-israel-brings-gaza-tactics-to-west-bank> (accessed August 8, 2025); "Israel's destructive West Bank military operation fuels mass forced displacement of Palestinians," Amnesty International news release, June 5, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/israels-destructive-west-bank-military-operation-fuels-mass-forced-displacement-of-palestinians/> (accessed August 8, 2025); "Israeli Forces Shoot a Woman in the Tulkarem Refugee Camp," IMEMC, August 1, 2025, <https://imemc.org/article/israeli-forces-shoot-a-woman-in-the-tulkarem-refugee-camp/?utm> (accessed August 8, 2025).

¹⁴² In the absence of up-to-date boundaries of the refugee camps, Human Rights Watch relied on publicly available boundaries defined by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS, 2017). https://geospatial-file-download-center-pcbs.hub.arcgis.com/datasets/ae7846f90d52460ba38959bbffb8872f_o/explore (accessed September 5, 2025). Additional reports and sources indicate that the camps have since expanded, so Human Rights Watch considered these boundaries as approximate. In some cases, satellite imagery analysis and witness accounts confirmed that demolitions were carried out beyond these historical boundaries.

¹⁴³ Zein Khalil and Ikram Kouachi, "Israel says army to stay 'for next year' in Palestinian refugee camp in occupied West Bank," *Anadolu Agency*, February 23, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-says-army-to-stay-for-next-year-in-palestinian-refugee-camp-in-occupied-west-bank/3490658?utm> (accessed August 8, 2025).



Satellite imagery recorded before and after the destruction within the Jenin refugee camp, six months after the Israeli military raided the refugee camp in January 2025, and subsequently destroyed and razed large parts of the refugee camp. Before image: November 15, 2024 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. After image: July 24, 2025 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. Camp boundaries (2017): Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), accessed on September 5, 2025.

On July 24, a military order issued by Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth designated the forested area near Nur Shams refugee camp a “closed zone,” prohibiting entry and stay without a permit until October 31, 2025.¹⁴⁴ An accompanying order issued the same day designated an area that includes Nur Shams refugee camp an “encirclement area,” restricting entry and exit until October 31, 2025, unless a permit is granted.¹⁴⁵ According to a United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Humanitarian Situation Update on August 31 Israeli authorities declared areas including Tulkarem and Nur Shams refugee camps and surrounding neighborhoods to be “military zones.”¹⁴⁶

Some camp residents were notified through the offices of the Palestinian District Coordination and Liaison Office (DCO), the main Palestinian administrative channel coordinating with the Israeli military’s civil administration in the occupied territory (COGAT), that their homes have been or will be demolished, while others have no idea if their homes are still standing. Civil society organizations including Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), as well as private law firms have filed multiple, separate petitions challenging the demolition orders, several of them on behalf of Palestinian residents of the camps. Petitions cited, among other arguments, violations of international humanitarian law, including forcible transfer and widespread destruction. In all the cases, the Supreme Court of Israel rejected the petitions, deciding not to intervene and granting the respondents – the Israeli military – wide discretion to invoke the grounds of urgent military necessity.¹⁴⁷

Residents described to Human Rights Watch the pain of being forced to leave their homes and not being able to return. Fadi K., a 69-year-old father of four, was born in Jenin refugee camp in 1956 and lived there his entire life. He was not in the camp the day the raid began on January 21 and has not been able to return since that day:

¹⁴⁴ المكتب الاعلامي - لجنة خدمات مخيم نور شمس (“Media Office - Nur Shams Camp Services Committee”), Facebook post, July 27, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbidoZuKPpqwZ43sbK9jH4hzQuPsWBywNjiKHL1sRr3uqt8GrFg736YWRTa1F6R8D72Tl&id=61571388862524 (accessed September 26, 2025).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ “Humanitarian Situation Update #318 – West Bank,” OCHA, August 28, 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-318-west-bank> (accessed September 26, 2025).

¹⁴⁷ Petitions and court documents can be found online at <https://www.adalah.org> and <https://www.english.acri.org.il>.

We didn't try to go back; we see the reality of the camp now. We're waiting to go back at any moment. We are existentially connected to the camp. We're willing to fix anything destroyed and damaged, just to go back.¹⁴⁸

Scale of Destruction across the Camps

Human Rights Watch's satellite imagery analysis revealed widespread destruction across all three camps as of July 24, 2025, with approximately 850 buildings destroyed or heavily damaged by the Israeli military.¹⁴⁹

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention and customary laws of war, Israel must allow residents to return to their homes once hostilities have ended. Defense Minister Katz himself conceded the camps had been emptied on February 23, 2025. The Israeli military had razed and bulldozed homes, clearing areas and demolishing residential buildings, for what in the satellite imagery appears to be new widened military access roads.

The July 24 OCHA Humanitarian Update noted:

Over the past two months [May to July], Israeli forces have continued to carry out demolitions in the three camps, but the areas remain inaccessible for further assessments. In the past week [in mid-July], according to residents near Jenin Camp, Israeli military bulldozers have been observed entering and exiting the camp, accompanied by the sounds of destruction and visible smoke rising from the central areas of the camp. In Tulkarm Camp, residents nearby also reported activity by Israeli military bulldozers within the camp.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Fadi K., West Bank, March 18, 2025.

¹⁴⁹ This analysis may underestimate the extent of the destruction due to the limitations of spatial resolution, image angle and timing of satellite imagery acquisitions.

¹⁵⁰ "Humanitarian Situation Update #308 — West Bank," OCHA, July 24, 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-308-west-bank> (accessed August 8, 2025).



Satellite imagery recorded before and after the Israeli military raided Nur Shams refugee camp in February 2025 shows destruction within the refugee camp after six months of Israeli military operations. Before image: October 14, 2024 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. After image: July 24, 2025 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. Camp boundaries (2017): Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), accessed on September 5, 2025.

The rubble of controlled demolitions, if not removed, drastically changes the land and can lead to permanent displacement of people who lived in the area. It is one of the clearest indicators of forced displacement in the refugee camps.¹⁵¹

Six months after Operation Iron Wall began, Human Rights Watch conducted an assessment of Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams refugee camps using high-resolution satellite imagery that was collected on July 24, 2025.¹⁵² Human Rights Watch also analyzed dozens of additional satellite images at varying spatial resolutions as well as geolocated video footage and photographs.

The assessment focused only on areas of mass destruction that included buildings destroyed and severely damaged, often due to the widening of alleys and roads in the densely built camps. The pattern of destruction shows a clear and seemingly permanent altering of the camps' infrastructure due to the destruction of homes and other buildings and appears to divide the camps into smaller sections or grids, ostensibly to facilitate military access and control.

Human Rights Watch analysis also shows that demolitions have been carried out using heavy machinery such as bulldozers¹⁵³ and excavators,¹⁵⁴ by setting fire to buildings,¹⁵⁵ and through the uncontrolled detonation of heavy explosives.¹⁵⁶ This is evidenced in footage and photographs geolocated and published on Geoconfirmed, a volunteer-driven visual verification platform, and confirmed by Human Rights Watch.

¹⁵¹ See for example, Save the Children, "Hope Under the Rubble": The Impact of Israel's Home Demolition Policy on Palestinian Children and Their Families, June 28, 2021, https://www.savethechildren.es/sites/default/files/2021-06/Hope_under_the_rubble_STC.pdf (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹⁵² To establish a baseline, Human Rights Watch used closest available "pre-operation images," as some damage had been reported before the operations started. These baselines are November 15, 2024 for Jenin camp and January 3, 2025 for Nur Shams and Tulkarem camps.

¹⁵³ @NemoAnno first geolocated the video. Anno Nemo (@NemoAnno), posted to X, February 10, 2025, <https://x.com/NemoAnno/status/1889043720084885784> (accessed September 8, 2025). Human Rights Watch researchers confirmed the geolocation.

¹⁵⁴ ليث جعار Laith Jaar (@LaithJaar), post to X, February 18, 2025, <https://x.com/LaithJaar/status/1891930251992670561> (accessed September 8, 2025).

¹⁵⁵ Eye on Palestine (@EyeonPalestine), post to X, February 18, 2025, <https://x.com/EyeonPalestine/status/1891888764210872518> (accessed September 8, 2025).

¹⁵⁶ افخاي اندري Avichay Adraee (@AvichayAdraee), post to X, February 2, 2025, <https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1886105757063471199> (accessed September 8, 2025).



Satellite imagery recorded before and after the Israeli military raided Tulkarem refugee camp in January 2025, shows destruction within the refugee camp after six months of Israeli military operations. Before image: October 14, 2024 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. After image: July 24, 2025 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. Camp boundaries (2017): Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), accessed on September 5, 2025.

Human Rights Watch additionally analyzed Israeli demolition orders and UN data to determine the number of buildings slated for demolition in each refugee camp.¹⁵⁷ The analysis found five Israeli-issued demolition orders shared on local social media channels: two for Jenin, two for Tulkarem, and one for Nur Shams. Human Rights Watch was unable to find an official channel through which the orders were shared and communicated to the population. Each order is accompanied by an aerial image of the relevant camp, with buildings slated for demolition marked with red circles. The total number of buildings that appeared slated for demolitions on those orders is 391, reflecting fewer than half of the buildings destroyed or severely damaged according to the assessment conducted by Human Rights Watch. In some cases, those aerial images show sections of the camp that include buildings already demolished prior to the demolition order. OCHA also has referenced an additional 42 buildings slated for demolition, not included in the demolition orders described below. Human Rights Watch did not find corresponding demolition orders for these buildings. The total number of demolition orders identified may be underestimated due to the absence of an official channel where the orders were consistently shared.

The texts of the orders refer to Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth, commander of the Central Command, as the responsible official for the demolitions. Bluth was appointed to his command in the West Bank on July 8, 2024. In August 2025, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel filed an official complaint with the Military Advocate General, Maj. Gen. Yifat Tomer Yerushalmi, calling for a criminal investigation into Bluth on suspicion of committing war crimes in the West Bank.¹⁵⁸

Jenin Camp

Jenin camp borders the Jenin municipality and is the northern-most camp in the West Bank. It was established in 1953 after the original camp in the area was destroyed in a snowstorm.¹⁵⁹ There were 24,239 Palestine refugees registered in the camp as of 2023, but

¹⁵⁷ “Humanitarian Situation Update – West Bank” OCHA, <https://www.ochaopt.org/publications/humanitarian-situation-update> (accessed September 26, 2025).

¹⁵⁸ “Israeli civil rights org. calls for investigation into IDF West Bank chief for suspected war crimes,” Jerusalem Post, August 28, 2025, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-865533> (accessed September 1, 2025).

¹⁵⁹ “Where we work: Jenin Camp,” UNRWA, undated, <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank/jenin-camp> (accessed August 14, 2025).

this figure does not represent the total population, just the number of those registered at the time with UNRWA.¹⁶⁰

Operation Iron Wall in Jenin camp began on January 21, 2025, resulting in the damage and destruction of more than 400 homes. The Israeli military claimed that half of them were justified by military necessity.¹⁶¹

On February 2, OCHA reported buildings being destroyed within Jenin refugee camp, saying, “Israeli forces detonated 23 residential structures in Jenin refugee camp, affecting more than 50 families.”¹⁶² A video published by Lt. Col. Avichay Adraee, the Israeli military’s Arabic-language spokesperson, shows the destruction of those buildings within Al-Samran neighborhood that he said were being “used as terrorist infrastructure.”¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch was not able to find any demolition orders for these buildings. The earliest instance of OCHA reporting on buildings slated for demolitions was on February 20.¹⁶⁴

In mid-February, photos shared on Telegram showed signs in Hebrew posted on the southern edge of the camp along badly damaged roads surrounded by destroyed infrastructure at Abu al-Haija intersection and in the Abdullah Azzam neighborhood. The signs bear the emblems of two Israeli military units in the top corners.¹⁶⁵ Those units are the 877th “Judea and Samaria” Division, responsible for operations in the West Bank, and the 431st Territorial Brigade “Menashe,” also known as the “Jenin Brigade.” Both units are under the command of Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth, who was on the ground in Jenin days after Operation Iron Wall began.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ See Annex and graphic on page 77.

¹⁶² “Humanitarian Situation Update #262 — West Bank,” OCHA, February 6, 2025, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/humanitarian-situation-update-262-west-bank> (accessed September 26, 2025).

¹⁶³ افياحي ادري (@AvichayAdraee), post to X, February 2, 2025, <https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1886105757063471199> (accessed September 8, 2025).

¹⁶⁴ “Humanitarian Situation Update #266 — West Bank,” OCHA, February 20, 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-266-west-bank> (accessed August 8, 2025).

¹⁶⁵ جنين ميس - Jenin Mix (@JeninMix), post to Telegram channel, February 12, 2025, <https://t.me/JeninMix/216046> (accessed September 26, 2025).

¹⁶⁶ “Footage of the Commanding Officer of Central Command, MG Avi Bluth, the Commanding Officer of the Judea and Samaria Division, BG Yaki Dolf, the Commanding Officer of the Menashe Brigade, COL A., and additional commanders during a situational assessment in Jenin,” Israeli Defense Forces, January 27, 2025, <https://videoidf.azureedge.net/bf7aa783-5be2-4c3f-95c7-dad42e5ccaod> (accessed September 8, 2025).

The emblem of the 877th Judea and Samaria Division also appears on a March 19, 2025 demolition order, located on an aerial image of Jenin refugee camp on which Israel military marked 95 houses in red as slated for demolition.¹⁶⁷ The accompanying text of the order gives civilians 24 hours to collect their belongings or submit a complaint after the publication of the notice:

By virtue of my powers as a military commander and my other powers under any law, and since I believe that the order is necessary for purely military purposes, I hereby order the following: I hereby order the demolition of the buildings. The process of demolishing the buildings shall begin within 24 hours from the time of signing this notice. ... Anyone who requests to evacuate his belongings from the house or makes any other claim has the right to appeal in this regard to the District Coordination and Liaison Office within a period not exceeding 24 hours from the time of publishing this notice.¹⁶⁸



Aerial image accompanying the March 19, 2025 demolition order marking in red 95 buildings slated for demolition by the Israeli military in the Jenin refugee camp in the northern West Bank. The emblem of the 877th Judea and Samaria Division can be seen on the image. Evidence submitted as part of court proceedings, courtesy of Adalah.

¹⁶⁷ Aerial image published alongside the text of a demolition order Human Rights Watch found posted online on March 19, 2025. اللجنة الشعبية لخدمات مخيم جنين (@pcs.jenin camp), Facebook post, March 19, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=962435236010662&set=a.567468348840688> (accessed September 8, 2025); AsdaaPress (@Nablus201), Facebook post, March 19, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/Nablus2021/posts/pfbidooKXzLPyDueLeJZ9Xjo2YLbtRRmwGghR46NsawZE8BpZWDXw58JGELseSYi5AQTRtl> (accessed September 8, 2025).

¹⁶⁸ See graphic on page 67.

March 19 Jenin Demolition Order

Original

English Translation

جيش الدفاع الإسرائيلي

إعلان بشأن هدم مباني لأغراض عسكرية بحتة-منطقة مخيم اللاجئين جنين

بموجب صلاحياتي كقائد عسكري وبإني صلاحياتي بموجب أي قانون، وبما أنني أعتقد أن الأمر ضروري لأغراض عسكرية بحتة، فإنني أمر بهذا ما يلي:

تعريفات

١. في هذا الإعلان

"الخريطة"- الخريطة الموقّعة بتوقيعي، والتي تحمل اسم هذا الإعلان والمرفقة له وتُشكل جزءاً لا يتجزأ منه.

هدم المباني

٢. أمر بهذا على هدم المباني، تبدأ عملية هدم المباني خلال ٢٤ ساعة من حين توقيع هذا الإعلان.

نشر

٣. أ. تسلم نسخ عن هذا الإعلان والخريطة لمديرية التنسيق والارتباط اللوائية.

ب. تسلم نسخ عن هذا الإعلان والخريطة للارتباط القسطنطيني بواسطة مديرية التنسيق والارتباط.

التوجه بخصوص المبنى موضوع الإعلان

٤. بحق لكل من يطلب الخلاص من البيت، أو الاندماج بأي شأن آخر، التوجه بهذا الخصوص لمديرية التنسيق والارتباط اللوائية خلال مدة زمنية لا تتجاوز ٢٤ ساعة من حين نشر هذا الإعلان.

السوف القسي بسلوط

١٩ آذار ٥٧٨٥

١٩ آذار ٢٠٢٥

قائد قوات جيش الدفاع الإسرائيلي

في منطقة יהודה والسامرة

[التصوير الجوي]

15

Israel Defense Forces

Announcement Regarding the Demolition of Buildings for Exclusive Military Purposes - Jenin Refugee Camp Area

By virtue of the powers vested in me as Military Commander and pursuant to my other powers under any law, and as I believe that that such action is essential for **exclusive military purposes**, I hereby order the following:

Definitions

1. In this order

"The Map" - Refers to the map, authenticated by my signature, bearing the title of this announcement, attached hereto and forming an integral part thereof.

Demolition of buildings

2. I hereby order the demolition of the buildings. **Demolition operations shall begin within twenty-four (24) hours** of signing this announcement.

Dissemination

3. a. Copies of this announcement and the map shall be delivered to the regional District Coordination and Liaison Office (DCL).

b. Copies of this announcement and the map shall be delivered to the Palestinian Liaison via the District Coordination and Liaison Office (DCL).

Petitions Regarding the Buildings Subject to this Announcement

4. Any person wishing to retrieve **personal belongings** from their house or submit any other claim is entitled to petition the regional District Coordination and Liaison Office (DCL) in this regard, **within a period not exceeding twenty-four (24) hours** from the publication of this announcement.

19 Adar 5785

19 March 2025

Alof Avi Bluth
Israel Defense Forces Commander
in Judea and Samaria Region

A screenshot of an announcement dated March 19, 2025, details an order issued by the Israeli military regarding the demolition of buildings in the Jenin refugee camp area “for exclusive military purposes.” The demolition order, signed by Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth, includes a map marking 95 buildings designated for demolition. Human Rights Watch was unable to find this order published through official Israeli military channels; Human Rights Watch found it posted online. This translation was done by Human Rights Watch and is not an official translation of the announcement.

An additional demolition order was issued on June 9, 2025, marking 87 buildings in red for demolition and allowing residents a period of 72 hours to collect their belongings or submit a complaint from the time the announcement was signed.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Aerial image published alongside the text of a demolition order Human Rights Watch found posted online on June 9, 2025. Fajer TV (@FajerTV), Facebook post, June 9, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/FajerTV/posts/pfbidorAtKRmEX3yyCE9AvcTftXAsSeGZNNEGtk9FeVUhdSekTftreeeHyqQ55gWBt7b1> (accessed November 11, 2025).



Aerial image accompanying the June 9, 2025 demolition order marking in red 104 buildings slated for demolition by the Israeli military in the Jenin refugee camp in the northern West Bank. The red markings on the map are faint, and Human Rights Watch did not alter them in order to maintain the original condition of image. Evidence submitted as part of court proceedings, courtesy of Adalah.

Human Rights Watch was unable to find any additional demolitions orders issued after June 9, but demolitions continued and expanded to buildings not marked in the orders that Human Rights Watch was able to find and verify.

In Jenin refugee camp, Human Rights Watch damage analysis based on satellite imagery collected on July 24, 2025 reveals that at least 400 buildings were destroyed or sustained severe damage. Due to limitations in the assessment, Human Rights Watch considers this figure likely to be an underestimate. Some of those buildings had already been destroyed before the orders were issued. Videos posted online prior to the first demolition order show bulldozers tearing down roads at the camp's entrance and large destruction in al-Damj neighborhood, on the eastern side of the camp.¹⁷⁰

After Anoud C. managed to find a place to rent, she said her brother and her niece returned briefly to their family home in Jenin refugee camp, about a month after they were expelled.

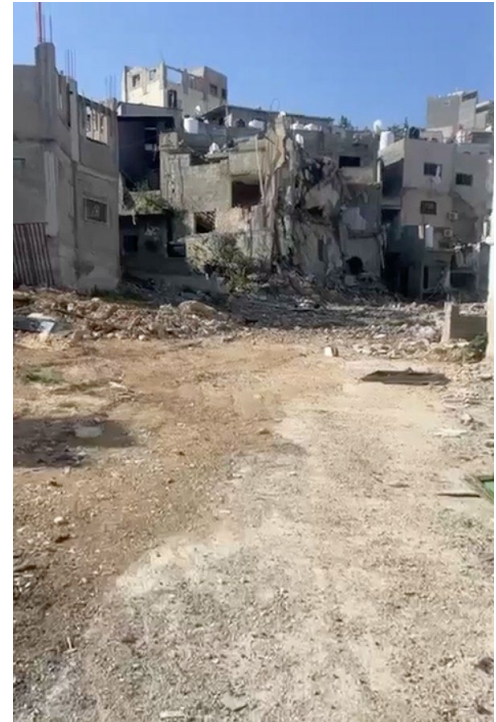
¹⁷⁰ مخيم جنين 24 ساعة (@jenencamb), post to Telegram channel, January 21, 2025, <https://t.me/jenencamb/82925> (accessed September 26, 2025); مخيم جنين 24 ساعة (@jenencamb), post to Telegram channel, January 21, 2025, <https://t.me/jenencamb/82923> (accessed September 26, 2025).

They managed to return unnoticed by concealing themselves from the Israeli soldiers who patrolled the camp:

Those who went back said that our house - where I live with my brother's family - was still standing. I mean the house walls are standing but inside it, everything is destroyed. ...

We're living in the hope of returning but we're broken inside because we don't know till when we will live on hope only.¹⁷¹

According to Human Rights Watch analysis, as of July 24, Anoud C.'s house seemed to be standing, but the destruction around it had increased since her family members returned to the camp to pick up their belongings. As their home is located along one of the widened alleys, it is likely that the facades of the house sustained severe damage.



In a still from an undated video taken after the Israeli military operation in Jenin refugee camp, heavily damaged Palestinian homes and debris are seen strewn across a street in the refugee camp in the northern West Bank. © 2025 Private

After Rima J. and her family found shelter in the Jenin Charitable Society, she tried three times to re-enter the camp to collect belongings that she needed. She was able to enter the camp the second time she tried during the month of Ramadan without the Israeli military noticing her:

We tried to enter near the Jenin governmental hospital and found there was no one there. ... We wanted to go in and out quickly. We found the stairs in our home had been destroyed along with the living room... and all the glass windows from all sides were broken.

We were able to take clothes for the children, family pictures and necessities, like kitchen stuff. ... And then we left. I was tired, and my heart started

¹⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Anoud C., West Bank, March 18, 2025.

aching. We were carrying so many things on our backs and running, going back and forth to the hospital to put the things we got from home. I didn't care anymore if I got caught or not. At one point we heard the sound of a grenade, and we left the house walking with our backs to the walls of the streets. We heard the sound of a military jeep and a D9 [bulldozer] demolishing houses. Then a soldier saw us, so we went back and sat on the staircase of my uncle's home. I wrapped cooking pots and rice in a blanket and carried it on my back. I kept holding on to them. I was terrified to go back and when we looked again, we didn't find any soldiers, so we started running like crazy. I thought a bullet to my back was better than one in my head.¹⁷²

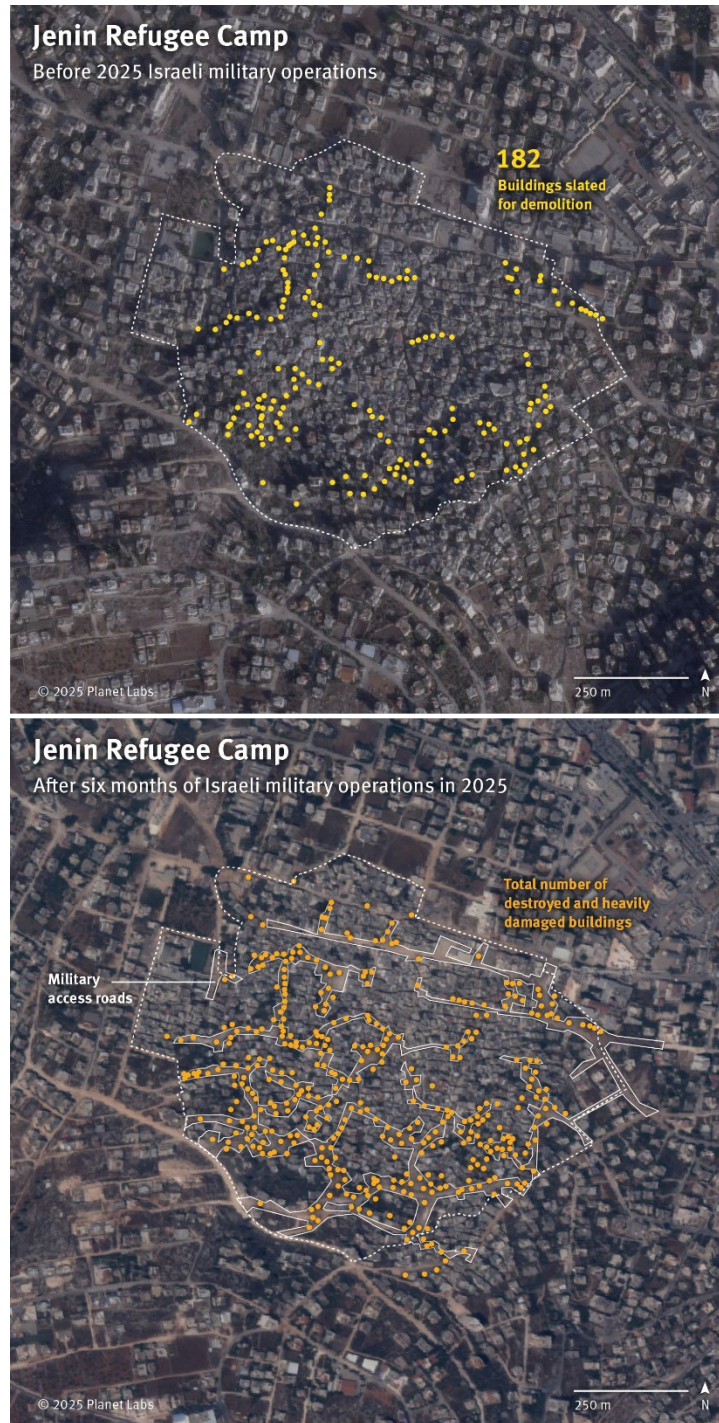
Other residents told Human Rights Watch that when they tried to return to their homes Israeli soldiers fired at them. Sara D. said that after she found shelter in the Society for the Blind school in Jenin, she tried to return to the camp to collect some of her belongings from her home:

A group of women gathered opposite the camp entrance. Suddenly, we started hearing gunshots toward us, so we hid in one of the houses and called the Red Crescent [Society] telling them to pick us up as Israeli soldiers were shooting at us. ... The Red Crescent told us they couldn't come because the Israeli military was blocking the area. We had a child with us too; she started crying and I kept comforting her. My niece suggested we try to leave the house one by one, but when she left, the Israeli soldiers started shooting at her. I was terrified, I was panicking, and almost lost consciousness.

We kept calling the Red Crescent asking about the coordination. It became noontime, so we decided to leave altogether holding each other's hands. I'm an older lady and I couldn't run; we started walking with our backs to the wall, and going from one wall to another, walking slowly until we reached the Red Crescent ambulance. When we crossed the road, the Israeli soldiers started shooting. We didn't see the soldiers but heard the tanks and gunfire.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Rima J., West Bank, March 19, 2025.

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with Sara D., West Bank, March 18, 2025.



Satellite-based damage assessment conducted by Human Rights Watch six months after the Israeli military operations started in Jenin Refugee camp indicates that more than 400 buildings were destroyed or severely damaged as of July 27, 2025. This figure is much higher than the 182 buildings slated for demolition included in two Israeli military-issued demolition orders signed by Aof Avi Bluth on March 19 and June 9, 2025. Before image: October 14, 2024 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. After image: July 24, 2025 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. Camp boundaries (2017): Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), accessed on September 5, 2025. Analysis and graphics © 2025 Human Rights Watch.

Tulkarem Camp

Tulkarem camp, established in 1950, is in Tulkarem City in the northwest of the West Bank. Built on an area of just 0.18 square kilometers (about 25 soccer fields), it is one of the most densely populated refugee camps in the West Bank. As of 2023, there were 27,631 Palestine refugees registered in the camp.¹⁷⁴

Operation Iron Wall in Tulkarem camp began on January 27, triggering the subsequent damage and destruction of more than 300 buildings, justified by Israeli military on the basis that 162 of them were demolished for reasons of military necessity.



Israeli military excavators demolish buildings in Tulkarem refugee camp in the northern West Bank, on February 18, 2025 © 2025 JAAFAR ASHTIYEH/AFP via Getty Images

¹⁷⁴ “Where we work: Tulkarm Camp,” UNRWA, undated, <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank/tulkarm-camp> (accessed November 11, 2025).

The first time OCHA reported on buildings slated for demolition at the Tulkarem camp was on February 18, 2025, documenting the Israeli forces' decision to demolish 14 residential buildings that week. Videos posted online on February 18 and verified by Human Rights Watch show buildings in al-Balawneh neighborhood being torn down.¹⁷⁵

On May 1 and June 30, 2025, copies of demolition orders issued by the Israeli military for Tulkarem camp were posted online.¹⁷⁶ The orders include aerial images showing 58 and 104 buildings respectively marked for demolition.



Aerial image accompanying the May 1, 2025 demolition order marking in red 58 buildings slated for demolition by the Israeli military in the Tulkarem refugee camp in the northern West Bank. Evidence submitted as part of court proceedings, courtesy of Adalah.

¹⁷⁵ Laith Jaar (@LaithJaar), post to X, February 18, 2025, <https://x.com/LaithJaar/status/1891930251992670561> (accessed September 26, 2025); Fajer TV الفجر (@FajerTV), Facebook video post, <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1FU6czkB7u/> (accessed September 26, 2025).

¹⁷⁶ Aerial images published alongside the text of a demolition order Human Rights Watch found posted online on May 1 and June 30, 2025. نور شمس إطولكرم (@noursams) post to Telegram, May 1, 2025, <https://t.me/noursams/79721> (accessed September 8, 2025); حكاية مخيم /نور شمس (@A.tale.camp) Facebook post, June 30, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/A.tale.camp/posts/pfbido2MsT4sv5Cdb7BaX3jBB6Wc8RRdSVy2GYcQtQAKAuKH5rjoQeqwzbqW9S1qAFiRy8MI> (accessed September 8, 2025).



Aerial image accompanying the June 30, 2025 demolition order showing the buildings slated for demolition by the Israeli military in the Tulkarem refugee camp in the northern West Bank. Evidence submitted as part of court proceedings, courtesy of Adalah.

Ali L., a 56-year-old father of four, stayed with his family in his home in Qaqun neighborhood on Services Street in the center of Tulkarem refugee camp long after the raid began on January 27. He told Human Rights Watch that he refused to leave his home unless and until he received a direct order to leave:

During the first 10 days, I could see the Israeli soldiers were surrounding the houses, and on top of the roofs and shooting at anyone and anything that moves. It was so horrible. We were scared to move inside the house. After 10 days, the Red Crescent was able to enter the camp, and they brought some food and aid. ... It was the first time we received food. ...

We stayed in the house until March 20. ... Some people left on the first day, but when it came to us, the [Israeli] soldiers came into the house many times and did some damage, but they didn't tell us to leave until March. On that day, the soldiers had gone to a house and told its resident to tell the rest of us in the neighborhood to leave. ... We were the last to leave the camp. At first, I tried to go to my daughter's place in Jenin, but then we moved to a house near the camp, which I am renting.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Ali L., West Bank, July 10, 2025.

Ali L. said that after he fled Tulkarem, he found out houses next to his home were slated to be demolished because he saw a map on television depicting the demolition area. Soon after, around June 30, he made a request through the offices of the Palestinian District Coordination and Liaison Office (DCO) to coordinate with the Israeli military for access to the camp to collect his belongings. He said if nearby properties were destroyed, his would certainly be heavily damaged.¹⁷⁸ He received confirmation from the DCO and entered Tulkarem camp on July 2:

When I entered, I found out that the roads were completely different. It was difficult to walk inside [the camp], because the roads were destroyed. Before I left [my house in March], I had secured the doors. I had put some wood around [the doors] to secure them. This [the wood around the doors] had been destroyed and some of our things were missing.¹⁷⁹

Ali L. said he could not check everything that was missing – and presumed stolen – from the house because the Israeli soldiers monitoring the process gave the families who had entered only several hours to collect their belongings.

Human Rights Watch spoke with a representative from the Red Crescent who was present during the July 2 coordination of families returning to collect belongings before demolition. She said:

The families didn't know what to take from the houses. It was heartbreaking. We didn't have a lot of trucks to enter [and help people move their things]. The Israeli soldiers gave us three to four hours, but every time one of our trucks went into the camp, the truck would have to be searched [by the Israeli soldiers] and the people also were searched. So, we couldn't help that much.

People couldn't take much of their stuff – most people were just able to take critical things. The soldiers were firing in the air at the same time. ...

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Ali L., West Bank, July 10, 2025.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

They scared the people a lot. There were so many soldiers. Most of the houses ... are now like an army base.

It was hot, some people were in shock, and they fainted, we had to move people outside to help them. I was standing there looking at the people losing everything.¹⁸⁰

Human Rights Watch confirmed that Ali L.'s house was destroyed a few weeks after he went to collect his belongings in early July. Even though his house was not included in the June 30 demolition order, Human Rights Watch analyzed satellite imagery from late July that shows it had been destroyed, along with hundreds of other houses.



In an undated photograph taken following the Israeli military raid in Tulkarem refugee camp, severely damaged Palestinian homes and debris from destroyed houses are seen lining a street widened by the Israeli military in the refugee camp in the northern West Bank. © 2025 Private

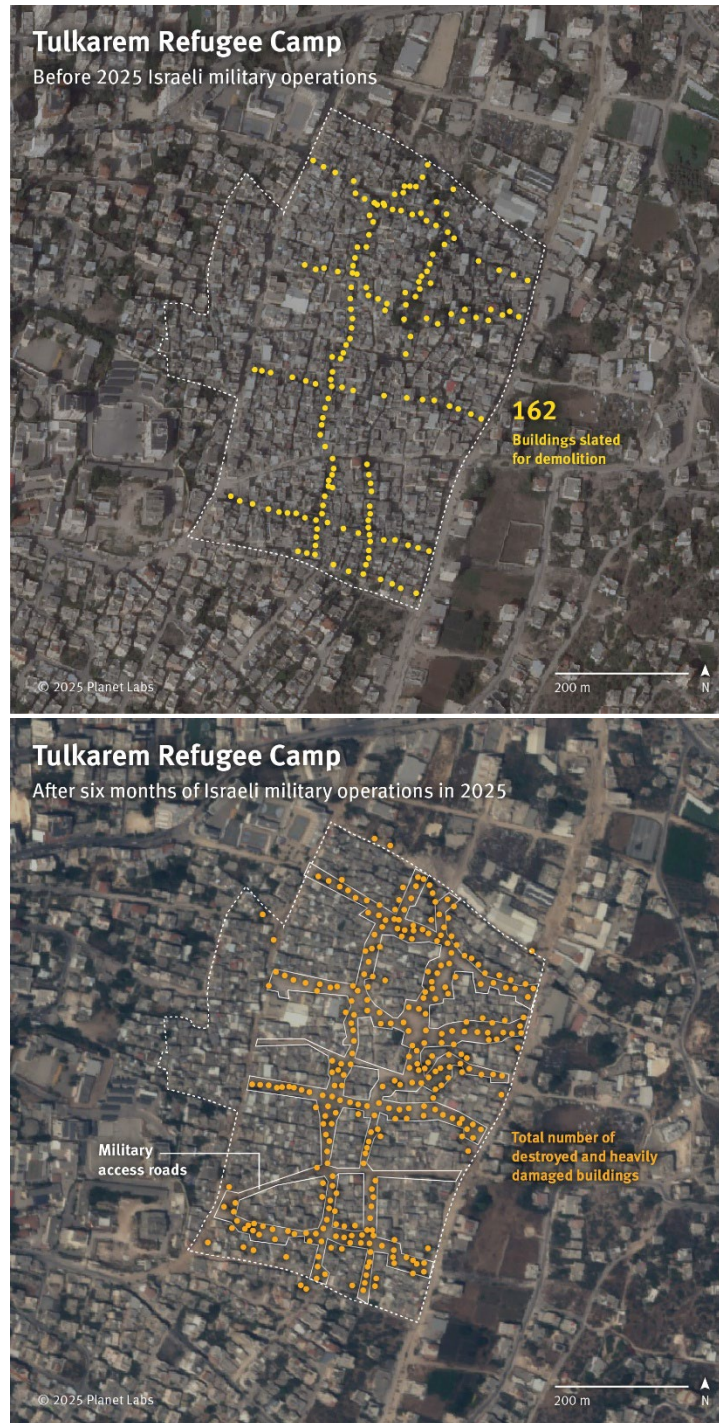
¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Red Crescent staff, July 3, 2025.

Human Rights Watch analyzed satellite imagery collected on July 24 over Tulkarem refugee camp and estimates that at least 300 buildings had been destroyed or sustained severe damage since the start of Operation Iron Wall.

About 150 buildings in Tulkarem camp that were not included in demolition orders were also destroyed or severely damaged since the operation began. Some of these buildings had already been destroyed almost a month before the first demolition order was issued, as confirmed in videos and reports found online and verified by Human Rights Watch that show demolitions were underway on January 28.¹⁸¹ Due to limitations in the assessment methodology, Human Rights Watch considers this figure to be an underestimation.

¹⁸¹ Fajer TV تلفزيون الفجر (@FajerTV), Facebook post, January 29, 2025,

<https://www.facebook.com/FajerTV/videos/1063918142159030> (accessed September 8, 2025); and Tulkarem Net | طولكرم نت (@TulkaremNet), post to Telegram channel, January 28, 2025.



Satellite-based damage assessment conducted by Human Rights Watch six months after the Israeli military raided Tulkarem Refugee camp in January 2025 indicates that more than 300 buildings were destroyed or severely damaged as of July 27, 2025. This figure is much higher than the 162 buildings slated for demolition included in two Israeli military-issued demolition orders signed by Alob Avith on May 1 and June 30, 2025. Before image: October 14, 2024 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. After image: July 24, 2025 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. Camp boundaries (2017): Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), accessed on September 5, 2025. Analysis and graphics © 2025 Human Rights Watch.

Nur Shams Camp

Nur Shams camp, established in 1952, is located in the northwest of the West Bank, roughly three kilometers east of the center of Tulkarm City. There were 13,739 Palestine Refugees registered in the camp as of 2023.¹⁸²

Operation Iron Wall extended to Nur Shams camp on February 9, leading to the damage and destruction of more than 170 buildings. The Israeli military has claimed that about a third of these were justified by military necessity.¹⁸³

OCHA first reported on demolitions in the camp on March 6.¹⁸⁴ Its report stated that since February 18, Israeli forces had notified residents that at least 41 residential structures in Nur Shams and in Tulkarem would be demolished and told residents to collect their belongings prior to their demolition. Twenty-seven of these buildings were located in Nur Shams.¹⁸⁵

On May 1, the Israeli military issued a demolition order for Nur Shams camp that was posted online.¹⁸⁶ The order slated 47 buildings in Nur Shams for evacuation and gave residents 24 hours to collect their belongings before their destruction commenced.

¹⁸² "Where we work: Nur Shams," UNRWA, undated, <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank/nur-shams-camp> (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹⁸³ See graphic on page 88.

¹⁸⁴ "Humanitarian Situation Update #270 West Bank," OCHA, March 6, 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-270-west-bank> (accessed September 3, 2025).

¹⁸⁵ On February 26 the Israeli military ordered the demolition of 11 buildings. "The West Bank: large scale house demolitions by ongoing Israeli Forces operation are having unprecedented impact on Palestine Refugee," UNWRA press release, March 6, 2025, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/west-bank-large-scale-house-demolitions-ongoing-israeli-forces> (accessed September 26, 2025). OCHA reported that an additional 16 buildings were slated for demolition on March 5. "Humanitarian Situation Update #270 – West Bank," OCHA, March 6, 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-270-west-bank> (accessed September 3, 2025).

¹⁸⁶ Aerial image published alongside the text of a demolition order Human Rights Watch found posted online on May 1, 2025. (@noursams) post to Telegram, May 1, 2025, <https://t.me/noursams/79721> (accessed September 8, 2025).



Aerial image accompanying the May 1, 2025 demolition order marking in red 47 buildings slated for demolition by the Israeli military in the Nur Shams refugee camp in the northern West Bank. The red markings on the map are faint, and Human Rights Watch did not alter them in order to maintain the original condition of image. Evidence submitted as part of court proceedings, courtesy of Adalah.

Human Rights Watch was unable to find any additional demolition orders issued for Nur Shams camp. As in Jenin and Tulkarem refugee camps, some of buildings in the camp had already been destroyed before any demolition orders were issued. Videos posted online as early as February 10 and 13, show Israeli military bulldozers destroying roads along al-Saleheen neighborhood in the eastern side of the camp and demolishing a building in the northern edge of the camp.¹⁸⁷

Human Rights Watch damage analysis based on satellite imagery collected on July 24 shows that at least 170 buildings were destroyed or sustained severe damage, three times more than the Israeli military initially announced. Due to limitations in its assessment methodology, Human Rights Watch considers this figure likely to be an underestimate.

¹⁸⁷ @NemoAnno first geolocated the video. Anno Nemo (@NemoAnno), posted to X, February 10, 2025, <https://x.com/NemoAnno/status/1889043720084885784> (accessed September 8, 2025). Human Rights Watch researchers confirmed the geolocation. مخيم نور شمس طولكرم (@nurshamstulkarem), post to Telegram channel, February 13, 2025.



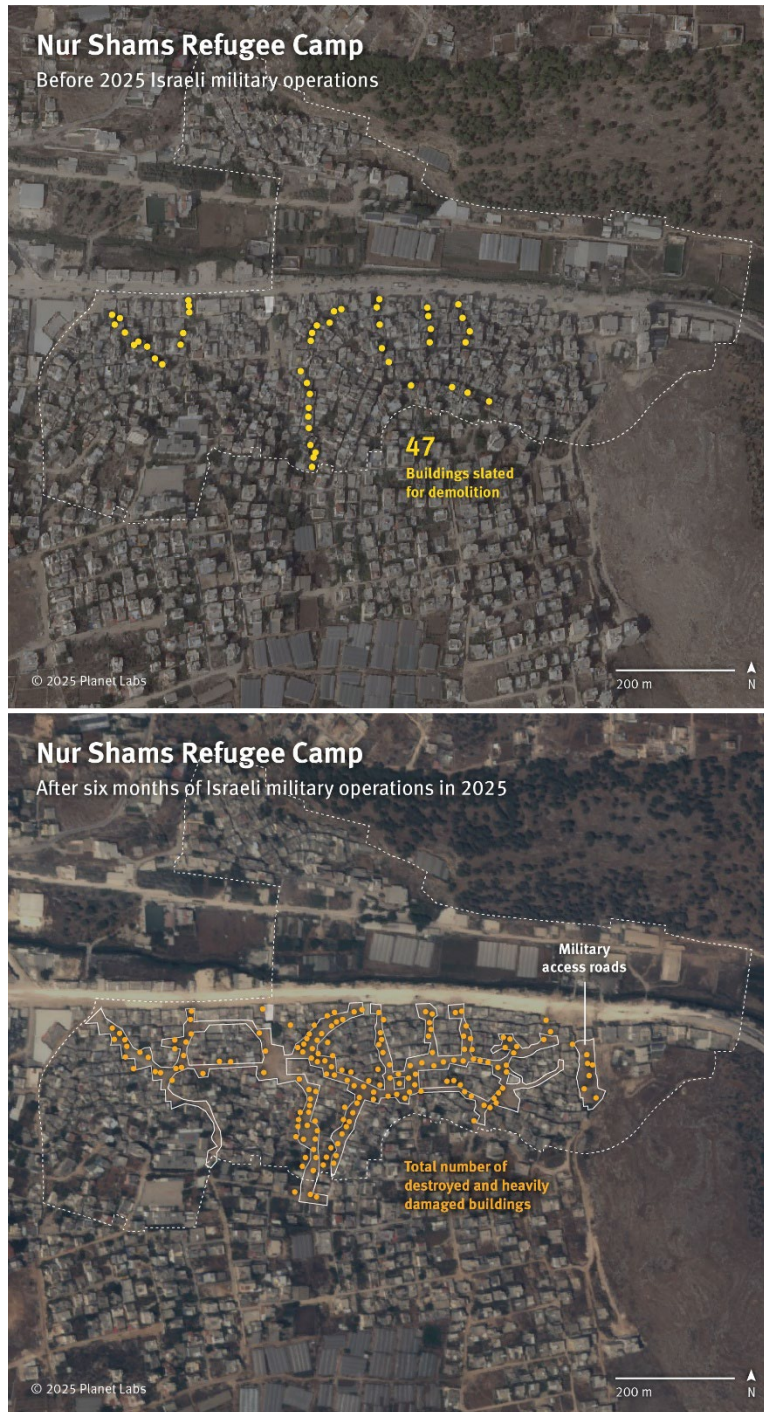
A view of Nur Shams refugee camp in the northern West Bank on June 25, 2025 after Israeli forces emptied the camp of its inhabitants, damaged Palestinian buildings and razed areas to create widened Israeli military access roads. © 2025 Nasser Ishtayeh/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

In May 2025, Nadine M.'s husband and daughter returned to their home in Nur Shams camp to collect some of their belongings. They had learned of a PA facilitated coordination with the Israeli authorities that allowed camp residents whose homes had been slated for demolition to collect what they could. Nadine M. said her husband and daughter were given just 10 minutes to access their home and described the destruction in the street.¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch verified a video shared directly with researchers showing Nadine M.'s neighborhood in ruins, the street bulldozed, and many of the homes destroyed.¹⁸⁹

Satellite imagery from July 24 shows an increase of destruction around Nadine M.'s neighborhood following the demolition order issued on May 1. As of end of July, her house was still standing.

¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Nadine M., West Bank, June 11, 2025.

¹⁸⁹ Videos shared directly with Human Rights Watch during interview with Nadine M., West Bank, June 11, 2025.



Satellite-based damage assessment conducted by Human Rights Watch six months after the Israeli military raided Nur Shams Refugee camp in February 2025 indicates that more than 170 buildings were destroyed or severely damaged as of July 27, 2025. This figure is much higher than the 47 buildings slated for demolition included in the Israeli military-issued demolition order signed by Aloh Avy Bluth on May 1, 2025. Before image: October 14, 2024 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. After image: July 24, 2025 © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. Camp boundaries (2017): Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), accessed on September 5, 2025. Analysis and graphics © 2025 Human Rights Watch.

International Legal Obligations

Individual or mass forcible transfers...are prohibited, regardless of their motive.

– Fourth Geneva Convention, article 49

The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip is an occupied territory (the Occupied Palestinian Territory) under international humanitarian law, also called the laws of war. This body of law addresses conduct by all parties to an armed conflict, including the means and methods of warfare and the treatment of people in custody, providing civilians and others with a set of protections. It recognizes the Israeli occupation as an ongoing armed conflict. The laws of war applicable include the Geneva Conventions of 1949, and customary international law.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, international criminal law, notably the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which prohibits forced displacement as a war crime and a crime against humanity, applies in the West Bank.

International human rights law also applies to Israel's conduct towards Palestinians in the occupied territory. The United Nations Human Rights Committee, the independent expert body that interprets the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), has repeatedly found that states are bound to respect the human rights treaties they have ratified outside of their borders and specifically that “the provisions of the Covenant apply to the benefit of the population of the Occupied Territories.”¹⁹¹

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) endorsed this view, starting in its advisory opinion regarding Israel's separation barrier, where it stated that the ICCPR “is applicable in respect of acts done by a State in the exercise of its jurisdiction outside its own territory.”¹⁹² The State of Palestine has also ratified the ICCPR and other human rights

¹⁹⁰ Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea (“Second Geneva Convention”), adopted August 12, 1949, 75 U.N.T.S. 85, entered into force October 21, 1950; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (“Protocol I”), adopted June 8, 1977, 1125 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force December 7, 1978.

¹⁹¹ UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee: Israel, CCPR/CO/78/ISR, August 5, 2003, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-179634/> (accessed November 11, 2025), para. 11.

¹⁹² ICJ, Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Wall, para. 111.

treaties, reinforcing their applicability throughout the occupied territory.¹⁹³ Israel maintains that its human rights obligations do not extend to the occupied territory.¹⁹⁴

While the law of occupation permits occupying powers to impose security restrictions on civilians, it also requires occupying powers to restore public life for the occupied population. That obligation increases over time in a prolonged occupation, as the occupier has greater opportunity to develop responses that are more narrowly tailored to security threats and that minimize restrictions on rights.¹⁹⁵ In addition, harm caused by the indefinite suspension or severe restriction of basic rights on the occupied population increases over time. Human Rights Watch has called on Israeli authorities, after more than a half-century of occupation, to fully respect the human rights of Palestinians, using as a benchmark the rights enjoyed by Israeli citizens.¹⁹⁶

Forced Displacement

Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to military occupations, prohibits an occupying power from forcibly transferring, displacing or deporting the civilian population of an occupied territory in whole or in part. Violation of this prohibition when committed by an individual with criminal intent is prosecutable as a war crime.

Article 49 prohibiting individual or mass forcible transfers of civilians from occupied territory to the territory of the occupying power or any other country makes clear that the prohibition is regardless of motive.¹⁹⁷

The ICRC's 2025 Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention notes that forcible transfers can be direct or indirect. They are direct when a warring party "orders deportation or is directly involved in organising or carrying it out."¹⁹⁸ They are indirect when a party

¹⁹³ See OHCHR, "UN Treaty Body Database," State of Palestine, undated, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=217 (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹⁹⁴ See "Use of Force in the Occupied West Bank," Human Rights Watch Q&A, May 8, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/08/use-force-occupied-west-bank>.

¹⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Born Without Civil Rights: Israel's Use of Draconian Military Orders to Repress Palestinians in the West Bank*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/12/17/born-without-civil-rights/israels-use-draconian-military-orders-repress>.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ ICRC, Geneva Convention IV (1949), arts. 49 and 147. Article 85(4)(a) of Additional Protocol I prohibit forcible transfer and Article 18 of the 1996 ILC Draft Code also contains a similar prohibition.

¹⁹⁸ ICRC, Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention (2025), art. 49, para. 3171.

does not expressly order or is not directly involved in the deportation, “but commits violations of international humanitarian law or human rights law with the effect to cause the population to leave, for example by unlawful destroying houses or imposing collective punishments.”¹⁹⁹ Forcible transfers can also be effected through acts “deliberately aimed at preventing or impeding the return of the population.”²⁰⁰

Parties to a conflict are only permitted to temporarily displace or evacuate civilians to protect them from the effects of an attack, or if civilian security or “imperative military reasons” require such displacement.²⁰¹ People evacuated in this way must be transferred back to their homes as soon as hostilities in the area in question have ceased.²⁰²

To constitute the crime of transfer, the transfer needs to be “forcible.” Consent to be moved must be voluntary and genuine and not given under coercive conditions. As the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has made clear, the absence of genuine choice making displacement unlawful and forcible can include psychological force caused by “fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power or by taking advantage of a coercive environment.”²⁰³

A transfer is therefore not voluntary if civilians agree or seek to be transferred as the only means to escape risk of abuse if they remain. Moreover, transferring or displacing civilians is not justified or lawful as being on humanitarian grounds if the humanitarian crisis

¹⁹⁹ ICRC, Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention (2025), art. 49, para. 3171.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., para. 3172.

²⁰¹ Article 58 of Additional Protocol I requires that parties to the conflict, “to the maximum extent feasible,” take the necessary precautions to protect civilians and civilian objects under their control from the dangers resulting from military operations, including seeking to remove civilians and civilian objects under their control from the vicinity of military targets.

²⁰² ICRC, Geneva Convention IV (1949), art. 49. The phrase “hostilities in the area in question” refers to the occupying power’s obligation to return evacuees as soon as operations have ended in that particular area, even if the broader conflict is still ongoing. According to the 1958 ICRC Commentary on article 49(2) of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the words “hostilities in the area in question” means that civilians “who have been evacuated are to be brought back to their homes as soon as the hostilities in the area have ended.” ICRC, Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, Commentary of 1958 (“1958 Commentary”), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-49/commentary/1958> (accessed November 11, 2025). The 2025 ICRC Commentary reaffirms this, stating that this language means that “evacuation is a temporary and provisional measure that must not last longer than required. The obligation to transfer evacuees back to their homes must be complied with ‘as soon as’ hostilities in the area in question have ceased. Compared with formulations such as ‘as soon as possible’ or ‘as soon as circumstances permit’, ‘as soon as’ does not make allowances for the Occupying Power’s capacities or constraints.” Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention (2025), para. 3202.

²⁰³ ICC, Elements of Crimes, 2013, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Elements-of-Crimes.pdf> (accessed July 2, 2025).

triggering the displacement itself is the result of unlawful activity by those responsible for the transfers.²⁰⁴

States' interpretation of forcible transfer indicates that the war crime of forced displacement can be committed without a direct order to do so.²⁰⁵

Imperative Military Reasons

The occupying power is obligated to establish that overriding military reasons made the evacuation imperative. The Commentary to the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions illustrates that the adjective *imperative* “reduces to a minimum cases in which displacement may be ordered.”²⁰⁶ The term imperative sets a very high threshold—higher than an ordinary assessment of military necessity. Displacement can only be justified if it is a measure of last resort for imperative military operations in which there are no feasible alternatives.²⁰⁷ It does not suffice for civilians to be at risk from an active or reasonably expected threat from an act that would deprive the enemy of a military advantage or secure such an advantage for the occupier.²⁰⁸

Even if the military objective is considered necessary and legitimate and there is a direct and vital link between the temporary population transfer and achieving that military objective, the occupying power must still uphold the principles of proportionality and humanity in conducting the temporary transfer.

²⁰⁴ United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), “Forcible Transfer,” undated, <https://cld.irmct.org/notions/show/370/forcible-transfer> (accessed July 2, 2025); IRMCT, “Forcible Displacement,” undated, <https://cld.irmct.org/notions/show/369/forcible-displacement> (accessed July 2, 2025).

²⁰⁵ International Crimes Database, The Evacuation of Eastern Aleppo: Forced Displacement Under International Law?, January 2019, https://www.internationalcrimesdatabase.org/upload/documents/20190109T160612-ICD%20Brief_Dec2018Forced%20Displacement%20in%20Syria%20as%20a%20Crime%20Under%20International%20Law.pdf (accessed July 2, 2025), p. 12.

²⁰⁶ ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (“Protocol II”), 8 June 1977, “Commentary of 1987,” 1987, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/apii-1977/article-17/commentary/1987> (accessed September 15, 2025).

²⁰⁷ The ICRC's Customary IHL database and emphasize that the displacement of civilians is a measure of last resort and subject to stringent conditions to prevent abuse of this provision and provides that any evacuation must be in the interest of the civilian population themselves. See also ICRC, 1958 Commentary.

²⁰⁸ The ICRC's 2025 Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention states: “Article 49 requires more than mere military necessity; it requires an *imperative* military necessity. In this context, ‘imperative’ refers to an absolute constraint of such vital importance that it leaves the Party in question with no other choice. It cannot be a question of military convenience or a military advantage to be gained by removing the population. The evacuation must be materially indispensable for military operations” (emphasis in original). ICRC, Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention (2025), art. 49, para. 3195.

An evacuation for imperative military reasons or for the security of the population will still only be lawful if the occupying power takes sufficient steps to safeguard civilians during their displacement and returns them to their homes as soon as it is safe to do so. Article 49(2) and (3) stipulates that the occupying power:

- Ensures that evacuations, to the greatest practicable extent, comply with displacement protections, specifically that proper accommodation is provided to receive the protected persons, that the removals are effected in satisfactory conditions of hygiene, health, safety and nutrition, and that members of the same family are not separated;
- Ensures that evacuated persons are transferred back to their homes as soon as hostilities in the area in question have ceased; and
- Not displace civilians outside of the occupied territory except when material reasons make it impossible to avoid such displacement.²⁰⁹

Wanton Destruction

Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and customary international humanitarian law prohibit “wanton destruction,” the extensive destruction of property not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly. This prohibition is drawn from the broader laws-of-war prohibition against deliberate, indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilian objects.²¹⁰

Under the laws of war, civilian objects are any objects that are not military objectives.²¹¹ Military objectives are only those that by their nature, location, purpose, or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose partial or total destruction, capture, or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage.

²⁰⁹ Geneva Convention IV (1949), art. 49.

²¹⁰ The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines “wanton destruction” as “extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly.” See ICRC, War Crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and their source in International Humanitarian Law, October 2008, https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/war-crimes-comparative-table.pdf (accessed November 11, 2025), art. 8(2)(a)(iv).

²¹¹ ICRC, Customary IHL, rule 5.

War crimes tribunals have held that a single act, if significant in scope such as the destruction of a hospital, may suffice to constitute the offense of unlawful and wanton destruction.²¹²

Wanton destruction of such property constitutes a war crime.²¹³

Violations of International Humanitarian Law

The Israeli military has not met the requirements for lawful evacuations under article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Its actions since the forced displacements may also amount to wanton destruction in violation of article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The military has not demonstrated a presence in the three refugee camps of military objectives, namely Palestinian fighters and military arms and supplies, that would justify the forced displacement of the entire population of the camps, some 32,000 people. No evident attempt has been made, at the time or since, to establish that the only feasible option available to Israeli forces was the complete evacuation of the civilian population to achieve its military objective.

In carrying out the evacuations, Israeli forces have not met the requirements under article 49(2) and (3) for the exemptions to forcible transfer. Israeli forces failed to provide camp residents with instructions on where to go after the Israeli military directed people to leave the camp under active military operations. Israeli forces did not meet either the immediate or long-term needs of the population, including shelter, food, water, and medical services. Israeli actions have in practice impeded humanitarian agencies by increasing the number of movement restrictions across the West Bank. As of early 2025, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) noted a total of 849 movement obstacles across the West Bank.²¹⁴

The Israeli government has also failed to meet its obligation to allow camp residents to return to their homes once hostilities in the area have ended. In the *Naletilić & Martinović*

²¹² ICRC, Customary IHL, rule 8.

²¹³ See ICRC, “Wanton destruction,” Glossary, undated, https://casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/wanton-destruction (accessed August 7, 2025).

²¹⁴ “West Bank Access Restrictions Map | July 2025,” OCHA, July 31, 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-access-restrictions-map-july-2025> (accessed November 11, 2025).

case at the ICTY, the tribunal considered whether the defendants had committed the war crime of forcible transfer. In its judgment the Trial Chamber noted:

When a genuine evacuation takes place, there is an obligation to bring the population back when the hostilities have ended. No attempts to return [the protected population] were made.²¹⁵

The Israeli military has blocked the entrances of all three refugee camps and used force against people who have tried to enter. Some residents have no idea what has happened to their homes and property while others were informed that their homes were slated to be demolished and were given just hours to collect their belongings. People who spoke to Human Rights Watch who have managed to enter the camps clandestinely have found their homes ransacked and damaged or partially destroyed. Many others do not know what has happened to their homes and wish only to return.

The widespread seemingly deliberate destruction of the three refugee camps following the forcible transfer of the population appears to be grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Conventions of 1949. In the absence of ongoing fighting, the Israeli military's broad use of controlled demolitions, and its razing and bulldozing of homes and widening of streets does not on its face meet the requirements of military necessity. It is creating permanent, systematic changes in the refugee camps that are unlawfully cementing the permanence of the forced displacement.

Individuals responsible for committing or ordering such deliberate destruction should be prosecuted for war crimes. Human Rights Watch has no access to the refugee camps and is not able to verify the nature and status of each of the buildings that have been demolished. However, where Israeli forces have demolished residential properties and civilian infrastructure in areas where fighting is no longer taking place, these actions could constitute wanton destruction and should be investigated.

²¹⁵ Prosecutor v. Naletilić & Martinović (Trial Chamber Judgment), ICTY-98-34-T, March 31, 2003, <https://www.refworld.org/jurisprudence/caselaw/icty/2003/en/40183> (accessed July 31, 2024), para. 512.

Forcible Transfer as a Crime Against Humanity

Crimes against humanity are part of customary international law and were first codified in the charter of the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal of 1945. Its purpose was to prohibit crimes that “either by their magnitude and savagery, by their large number, or by the fact that a similar pattern was applied...endangered the international community or shocked the conscience of mankind.”²¹⁶ Since then, the concept has been incorporated into a number of international treaties and the statutes of international criminal tribunals, including the Rome Statute of the ICC.

The State of Palestine acceded to the Rome Statute in 2015.²¹⁷ It filed a declaration that gives the ICC jurisdiction over crimes in the Rome Statute since June 13, 2014.²¹⁸ The Rome Statute, therefore, is directly applicable for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the West Bank.²¹⁹ The Court’s jurisdiction includes all persons alleged to be responsible for such crimes in the West Bank, including Israeli nationals.

The definition of crimes against humanity varies slightly by treaty, but the definition found in the Rome Statute, which largely reflects customary international law, includes a range of serious human rights abuses committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.²²⁰ Such an “attack” is defined as a course of conduct involving the multiple commission of such criminal acts pursuant to a state or organizational policy to commit the crimes.²²¹

²¹⁶ History of the United Nations War Crimes Commission and the Development of the Laws of War (1943), p. 179, quoted in Rodney Dixon, “Crimes against humanity,” in *Commentary on the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (O. Triffterer, ed.) (1999), p. 123.

²¹⁷ “ICC Welcomes Palestine as a New State Party,” ICC press release, April 1, 2015, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/icc-welcomes-palestine-new-state-party> (accessed May 15, 2025).

²¹⁸ “Palestine Declares Acceptance of ICC jurisdiction Since 13 June 2014,” ICC press release, January 5, 2015, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/palestine-declares-acceptance-icc-jurisdiction-13-june-2014> (accessed May 15, 2025).

²¹⁹ “Decision on the Prosecutor’s Request Related to Territorial Jurisdiction over Palestine,” ICC Pre-Trial Chamber press release, February 5, 2021, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-issues-its-decision-on-the-prosecutors-request-related-to-territorial-jurisdiction-over-palestine-press-release/> (accessed August 4, 2025). Palestine lodged a declaration under article 12(3) of the Rome Statute accepting the jurisdiction of the ICC for crimes committed in its territory since June 2014, see ICC, “State of Palestine,” ICC-01/18, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/palestine> (accessed August 4, 2025).

²²⁰ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (“Rome Statute”), A/CONF.183/9, July 17, 1998, entered into force July 1, 2002, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/resource-library/documents/rs-eng.pdf> (accessed August 4, 2020), art. 7.

²²¹ Rome Statute, article 7(2)(a).

The 1998 Rome Statute of the ICC, which came into force in 2002, sets out eleven categories of crimes that can amount to a crime against humanity. Deportation or forcible transfer of population are listed as distinct crimes against humanity, defined as the “forced displacement of the persons concerned by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully present, without grounds permitted under international law.”²²²

The attack against a civilian population underlying the commission of crimes against humanity must be widespread or systematic; it need not be both.

“Widespread” refers to the scale of the acts or number of victims.²²³ The Iron Wall attack was widespread. The Israeli military expelled all residents from the refugee camps of Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams. The refugee camps were completely emptied and some 32,000 Palestinians from these camps have been forced to seek safety and refuge elsewhere.²²⁴

“Systematic” refers to the organized, deliberate, and planned nature of the attack, which can be evidenced by state policy. Such a policy includes the state or organization actively promoting or encouraging such an attack, or in certain situations, its deliberate failure to take action.²²⁵

Ethnic Cleansing

Though the term “ethnic cleansing” has no formal definition under international law, a UN Commission of Experts defined it as a “purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas” where “the purpose appears to be the occupation of territory to the exclusion of the purged group or groups.”²²⁶

²²² Rome Statute, article 7(1)(d); article 7(2)(d).

²²³ Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Appeals Chamber), Case ICTR-96-4-A, ICTR Trial Chamber, September 2, 1998, para. 579; Kordic & Cerkez, ICTY, Case IT-95-14/2, ICTY Trial Chamber, February 26, 2001, para. 179; Prosecutor v. Clément Kayishema and Obed Ruzindana, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Case ICTR-95-1-A, ICTR Trial Chamber, May 21, 1999, para. 123.

²²⁴ As of September 10, 2025, 31,919 Palestinians remained displaced from Jenin, and Tulkarem. “West Bank Monthly Snapshot - Casualties, Property Damage and Displacement | August 2025,” OCHA, September 24, 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-monthly-snapshot-casualties-property-damage-and-displacement-august-2025>, (accessed November 11, 2025).

²²⁵ Rome Statute, article 7(2)(a).

²²⁶ UN Security Council, Letter Dated 24 May 1994 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council, May 27, 1994, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n94/200/60/pdf/n9420060.pdf> (accessed November 11, 2025).

The definition rests on three crucial components. “Purposeful policy” designates coordinated actions by individuals and groups (whether formal or informal), acting in the pursuit of a common goal; qualifying acts as “purposeful policy” may rely on demonstrating the implication of government bodies, but does not require it.²²⁷ The second component, the “remov[al] by one ethnic or religious group...the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas,” indicates that the policy aims at widespread displacement of a given group.²²⁸ Finally, ethnic cleansing relies on “violent and terror-inspiring means.”²²⁹

While it is beyond the scope of this report to analyze the group identities of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, within the local context Palestinians and Jewish Israelis are regarded as separate identity groups that fall within the broad understanding of “ethnic or religious group.”²³⁰ The Palestinian National Charter defines Palestinians as “those Arab nationals who, until 1947, normally resided in Palestine,” emphasizing that the identity is “transmitted from parents to children.”²³¹ Even within Israel where both Jews and Palestinians are citizens, authorities classify Jews and Palestinians as belonging to different “nationalities.”²³²

The UN Commission of Experts further defined the means of ethnic cleansing to include crimes such as “murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extra-judicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, deliberate military attacks or threats of attacks on civilians and civilian areas, and wanton destruction or property.”²³³

²²⁷ UN Security Council, Letter Dated 24 May 1994 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination notes that “‘racial discrimination’ shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin. OHCHR, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, December 21, 1965, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-elimination-all-forms-racial> (accessed November 11, 2025).

²³¹ See the Avalon Project, Yale Law School, “the Palestinian National Charter, The Palestinian National Charter: Resolutions of the Palestine National Council,” July 1-17, 1968, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/21st_century/plocov.asp (accessed November 6, 2024).

²³² Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed*.

²³³ UN Security Council, Letter Dated 24 May 1994 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council.

Human Rights Watch found that the Israeli military's unlawful displacement in the West Bank refugee camps in early 2025 were conducted through serious human rights violations and violations of international law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Israeli military intentionally and purposefully displaced thousands of Palestinians in the refugee camps by means of forced displacement. It forcibly expelled people from their homes using violence and the fear of violence and at times used lethal force. The Israeli army did not provide safe routes out of the camps, and just directed people to leave while at the same time apparently deploying snipers and immediately commencing the destruction of homes.

The actions of the Israeli authorities in the refugee camps are the actions of one ethnic or religious group to remove Palestinians, members of another ethnic or religious group, from certain geographic areas by violent means. The organized, forced displacement of Palestinians in the refugee camps has removed nearly the entire Palestinian population from these areas that, for decades and generations, has been their home. This is evident in areas that have been razed, extended, and cleared for new and widened military access roads. These areas are now fully emptied of Palestinian men, women, and children, and the Israeli government has given no indication that the residents of the camps would be allowed to return.

Israeli officials who ordered or oversaw the forced displacement of the refugee camps have made clear in oral and written statements their intention to remove Palestinians from the camps. Taken together, these acts and actions by the Israeli military on the ground, such as camp residents not being able to return and widened military access roads in the camps, indicate that Israeli authorities are pursuing a policy of ethnic cleansing.

Individual Criminal Responsibility

The commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity can serve as the basis for individual criminal liability not only in the domestic courts of the country where the crimes take place, but also in international courts and tribunals, as well as in other countries' courts under the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national law.

Individual criminal liability extends beyond those who carry out the acts to those who order, assist, facilitate, aid, and abet the offense. Under the principle of command or superior responsibility, military and civilian officials up to the top of the chain of command can be held criminally responsible for crimes committed by their subordinates. Responsibility attaches higher up the chain of command when superiors knew or should have known that their subordinates were committing such crimes but failed to take reasonable measures to prevent the crimes or punish those responsible.

Human Rights Watch has found that the Israeli authorities have committed multiple acts of forced displacement in the West Bank beginning in early 2025. These acts were in furtherance of an organizational policy to commit the criminal act of forcible transfer, which means the forced displacement of any civilian inside an occupied territory, and therefore amount to an “attack directed against a civilian population” and a crime against humanity.²³⁴

As discussed below, senior officials in the Israeli government have repeatedly declared their intent to forcibly displace the population, declaring their policy goal since the commencement of Operation Iron Wall and continued many months later. The statements of intent by senior members of government demonstrate the underlying state-level policy to forcibly transfer the population of the three refugee camps.

Israeli military forces stormed all three camps, systematically expelling residents, area by area, forcing people to leave during active military operations and while bulldozers and other heavy machinery started implementing widespread destruction in the camps. The Israeli authorities completely disregarded their obligations under the Fourth Geneva

²³⁴ Forcible transfer means the forced displacement of any civilian inside an occupied territory.

Convention to institute an evacuation system to adequately and safely move camp residents before operations began. They also failed to provide for the population and made no attempt to send people to designated shelters where they could receive food, medical aid and humanitarian services. The displacement has not been temporary and many months after active hostilities ended in the camps, no one has been allowed to return. Israel has signaled its intention to prohibit return to the camps for at least a year. Under the laws of war, authorities must return civilians as soon as hostilities in the areas in question cease. Instead, many months after emptying the camps, Israel appears to be trying to make such return impossible by unilaterally and unequivocally making permanent changes to the camp infrastructure.

Any specific prosecution of crimes against humanity would need to meet a criminal law standard for individual criminal culpability. While agents of the Israeli government in their official capacity as members of the Israeli military allegedly committed these crimes, Israel's documented record of failing to hold to account perpetrators of serious human rights abuses against Palestinians, including forcible transfer in the occupied West Bank in the past, highlights the importance of criminal investigations in international courts and courts in other countries exercising universal jurisdiction.²³⁵

Criminal Intent

When forced displacement is carried out willfully, meaning that the perpetrator either had the intent to displace individuals by means of force or coercion without their genuine consent, or should have been aware of doing so, from the area in which they were lawfully present, the act can amount to a war crime and, if other conditions are met, a crime against humanity.²³⁶ The war crime of forced displacement requires that the perpetrator willfully displaced protected persons without grounds permitted by international law, while the intent for crimes against humanity requires the knowledge that this displacement was part of a broader campaign against the population.²³⁷

²³⁵ Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed*.

²³⁶ See Knut Dormann, *Elements of War Crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (ICRC: Cambridge, 2002) p. 112; Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadžić, Case No. IT-95-5/18-T, Trial Chamber, March 24, 2016, http://www.icty.org/x/cases/karadzic/tjug/en/160324_judgement.pdf (accessed July 2, 2025).

²³⁷ ICTY, Prosecutor v. Stakić (2003).

Forced displacement does not necessarily require physical force; it can still be a war crime or crime against humanity if the displacement includes threats, coercion, or other forms of duress that leave the victims with no real choice but to leave.²³⁸ The element of intent here involves willfully creating the circumstances that compel the victims to move. The effect is to unlawfully interfere with their right to live in their homes and communities.²³⁹

The war crime and the crime against humanity of forced displacement do not necessarily require the intention of the perpetrator to transfer the population permanently.²⁴⁰

The Israeli government sought to justify the military operation on the basis of imperative military reasons and the security of Israeli citizens. On February 24, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar stated that the military operation was “taking place [in the West Bank] against terrorists, and [has] no other objectives but that.”²⁴¹

However, the public statements by senior Israeli officials are indicative of an intent to forcibly displace the population contrary to article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and customary laws of war. These include:

- Minister in the Defense Ministry Bezalel Smotrich, who sits on the security cabinet and also serves as Minister of Finance, February 10, 2025. “The residents of Judea and Samaria [a reference to the West Bank] must understand that if they continue their acts of ‘terrorism,’ their fate will be like that of Gaza’s residents. ... Tulkarem and Jenin will look like Jabalia and Shuja’iyya [war-torn refugee areas in Gaza]. ... They will also be turned into uninhabitable ruins, and their residents will be forced to migrate and seek a new life in other countries.”²⁴²
- Minister of Defense Israel Katz, February 23, 2025. “I have instructed the IDF to prepare for a prolonged stay in the camps that have been cleared for the coming year – and not to allow residents to return and terrorism to grow again. ...

²³⁸ ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Stakić* (2003).

²³⁹ International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), “Forcible Transfer,” undated, <https://cld.irmct.org/notions/show/370/forcible-transfer#> (accessed July 2, 2025).

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ “West Bank Palestinians fear Gaza-style clearance as Israel squeezes Jenin camp,” *The Straits Times*, February 25, 2025, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/west-bank-palestinians-fear-gaza-style-clearance-as-israel-squeezes-jenin-camp> (accessed August 8, 2025).

²⁴² Zein Khalil and Rania Abu Shamala, “Israel’s Smotrich vows escalation against Palestinians in West Bank, threatens Gaza-like fate,” *Anadolu Agency*, February 10, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-s-smotrich-vows-escalation-against-palestinians-in-west-bank-threatens-gaza-like-fate/3477676> (accessed November 11, 2025).

Palestinians have so far evacuated from the Jenin, Tulkarm and Nur a-Shams refugee camps, and they are currently empty of residents.”²⁴³

- Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth, chief of the Central Command, April 2025. “We are operating in the refugee camps and carrying out significant operations that change the character of the entire area.”²⁴⁴
- Minister Smotrich, July 4, 2025. “The perception of security must change; Tulkarm must be reduced to ruins.”²⁴⁵

Human Rights Watch urges the ICC’s Office of the Prosecutor and national judicial authorities under the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws to investigate Israeli authorities for alleged forced displacement and unlawful demolition of civilian property as war crimes and the crime against humanity of forcible transfer. Such an investigation should also examine those who are, or who have been, in the chain of command of those responsible for implementing the unlawful forced displacement in the West Bank.

Human Rights Watch’s research indicates that **Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth**, as the commander of Central Command in charge of military operations in the West Bank, should be investigated for individual criminal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including as a matter of command responsibility, concerning the expulsion, some 32,000 people from the refugee camps of Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams.

Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth reports to the Chief of the General Staff of the Israeli army. Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi held this role until March 5, 2025, at which time Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir took over. Halevi and Zamir should also be investigated for individual criminal responsibility in these crimes as a matter of command responsibility.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ “IDF confirms at least 13,000 Palestinians evacuated from refugee camps in Samaria, DM Katz says no return allowed,” All Israel News, February 24, 2025, <https://allisraelnews.com/idf-confirms-at-least-13000-palestinians-evacuated-from-refugee-camps-in-samaria-dm-katz-says-no-return-allowed> (accessed August 8, 2025).

²⁴⁴ Hanan Greenwood, “Commander of Central Command: ‘We have stepped up the gear, the fighters’ actions are changing the face of the entire space’” (“מפקד פיקוד מרכז: ‘העלנו הילוך, פעולות הלוחמים משנות את פני המרחב כולו’”), Israel Hayom, April 23, 2025, <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/news/defense/article/17805724>, (accessed November 11, 2025).

²⁴⁵ “בצלאל סמוטריץ’ (Bezael Smotrich) (@bezaelsm), post to X, July 4, 2024, <https://x.com/bezaelsm/status/1808882066387325140> (accessed November 11, 2025). For context, see “Smotrich: ‘Tulkarem should become a city of ruins’” (“סמוטריץ’: ‘טולכרם צריכה להפוך לעיי חורבות’”), Channel 12 (Israel), July 4, 2024, https://www.mako.co.il/news-politics/2024_q3/Article-ee47a51f27e7091027.htm (accessed November 11, 2025).

²⁴⁶ “Farewell Speech from the Outgoing IDF Chief of the General Staff LTG Herzi Halevi,” Israel Defense Forces YouTube, March 5, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXc9fK5J8NU> (accessed November 11, 2025).

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Minister of Defense Israel Katz, and minister in the Defense Ministry Bezalel Smotrich, who sits on the security cabinet and also serves as Minister of Finance, should also be investigated for individual criminal responsibility, including as a matter of command responsibility, for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Acknowledgments

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We are grateful to the Palestinian men, women, and children in the West Bank who were willing to share their experiences, including tragic personal accounts.

Annex: Response from the IDF International Press Desk

From: IDF International Press Desk [Redacted]

Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2025 1:01 PM

To: HRW MENA [Redacted]

Subject: Re: Letter from Human Rights Watch: Re: Mass Displacement in Three West Bank Refugee Camps

About ten months ago, the IDF launched Operation “Iron Wall” in the camps of Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur al-Shams, in light of the security threats posed by these camps and the growing presence of terrorist elements within them. The operation was based on the understanding that terrorists exploit the terrain and the densely built environment of the camps, which restricts the IDF’s freedom of action. And that Hamas plant explosive devices in houses, civilian infrastructure, and along traffic routes in order to detonate them, thus endangering the lives of security forces and local residents. Since the IDF launched the operation, terrorism in the West Bank has decreased by 70%.

During the operation, IDF uncovered terrorist infrastructure and weapons that had been hidden by terrorists in civilian areas. The forces continue to work to dismantle bomb-making labs and weapons facilities established inside homes. It should be noted that such explosives have caused the deaths and injuries of security personnel, while also endangering the lives of residents in the area. These explosives were intended for additional terror attacks.

In order to locate and uproot the terrorist infrastructure at its source, the IDF has had to operate for an extended period of time, as required by operational needs and the circumstances on the ground.

As part of the campaign, the IDF is acting to reshape and stabilize the area. An inseparable part of this effort is the opening of new access routes inside the camps, which requires the demolition of rows of buildings. The decision to demolish these buildings was made based on operational necessity, with careful consideration and only after alternative options to achieve the same military advantage were examined.

Despite the urgency of opening these routes and the essential nature of the work for continuing operations in the three camps, a public notice was issued before the demolitions, giving residents sufficient time to submit objections and petitions to the High Court of Justice. These petitions were rejected after the Court ruled that the demolitions were conducted lawfully, based on military necessity and with the required proportionality.

The IDF will continue to act to thwart terrorism in north Samaria, in accordance with international law and the rulings of the Israeli High Court of Justice, while making feasible efforts to avoid harm to the civilian population.

We will not elaborate on future operational plans, but note that the issue has been discussed substantively with the political echelon.

Regarding your tenth question:

A. Following the incident, a Military Police investigation has been opened. Upon its completion, the findings will be transferred to the Military Advocate General's Office for review. Naturally, we cannot provide details on an ongoing investigation.

B. In connection with the case of Rahaf al-Ashkar, forces were preparing to arrest a wanted terrorist known to the security system and residing in Nur al-Shams, within the jurisdiction of the Ephraim Brigade.

The forces called on the residents of the house to come out in order to arrest the suspect. When they did not respond, the forces were compelled to breach the door using explosives. As a result of the breach, a woman in the house was injured. The forces coordinated the rapid arrival of the Red Crescent to treat her.

C. The IDF operates wherever necessary, the IDF acts in accordance with international law and takes all possible precautions to minimize harm to uninvolved civilians.

Attached are supporting visuals of terror activity in North Samaria:

<https://IDFANC.activetrail.biz/ANC240820256542276>

IDF Troops Conducting Searches in the Jabriyat Mosque:

<https://bit.ly/4j7NM57>

Terrorists who fired at IDF soldiers from within the Khalid Ibn al-Walid Mosque:

<https://bit.ly/4abE7q5>

Terrorist Hurling an Explosive From a Mosque in Tulkarm:

<https://bit.ly/3Pzfx9j>

An Explosives Lab that was Located in Tulkarm:

<https://bit.ly/4fNEiuA>

Weapons used by terrorists who carried out the shooting attack in Funduq on January 6, 2025, in which three Israeli citizens were murdered and six others were injured:

<https://IDFANC.activetrail.biz/ANC2301202564553294>

Weapons that were located by the soldiers of Egoz Unit in Jenin:

<https://idfanc.activetrail.biz/IDFANC270120255>

Observation Command Center Located in Jenin:

<https://bit.ly/4hbG4Wb>

Explosives lab located in Jenin:

<https://bit.ly/3ULLHB3>

“All My Dreams Have Been Erased”

Israel’s Forced Displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank

On January 21, 2025, two days after a ceasefire was announced in Gaza, the Israeli military launched “Operation Iron Wall,” a large-scale assault on three refugee camps in the West Bank. The operation forcibly displaced the entire populations of the Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams refugee camps. Israeli authorities provided no shelter or humanitarian assistance to the 32,000 residents expelled. Ten months later, the authorities have continued to deny these residents the right to return to their homes and have bulldozed and razed large sections of the camps. Israeli forces have shot at people trying to access their homes and have permitted refugees whose homes were slated for demolition only a narrow window of time to return to collect essential belongings.

“All My Dreams Have Been Erased” examines the actions of Israeli authorities during this operation and finds them responsible for war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. The report is based on interviews with 31 displaced Palestinians from the three refugee camps and an analysis of satellite imagery, demolition orders, videos, and photographs.

The report calls on the Israeli government to end the forced displacement of Palestinians and to ensure their right of return. It calls for investigations by the International Criminal Court and domestic courts under the principle of universal jurisdiction, and where there is evidence of responsibility, prosecution of senior Israeli officials for war crimes and crimes against humanity. It calls on governments to press Israeli authorities to end their repressive policies, including imposing an arms embargo, banning trade with West Bank settlements, and committing to enforce the International Criminal Court’s arrest warrants.



Women carry children as Israeli forces forcibly displace them from Nur Shams refugee camp in the northern West Bank, with Israeli soldiers looking on, one with his weapon raised, on February 10, 2025. © 2025 Wahaj Bani Moufleh