

EXPULSION BY OTHER MEANS: ISRAEL'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST PALESTINIANS IN MASAFER YATTA

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Issue Brief #3 | November 2022

The Israeli government is waging a campaign of harassment, deprivation, and property destruction against Palestinians in Masafer Yatta that is gradually making their lives unsustainable, with the apparent goal of making them opt to leave. In May 2022, Israel's High Court [upheld](#) the longstanding expulsion order against the Palestinian communities inside the area Israel designated as Firing Zone 918. **In less than six months since the Court's decision – as Israel's *Haaretz* newspaper has [reported](#) – “life in the area has changed beyond recognition.”**

Human rights monitors agree that Israel has “increasingly intensified a [coercive environment](#) for Palestinians in Masafer Yatta” since the [High Court decision](#). Faced with the prospect that Israel could expel over 1,000 Palestinians from their land, the international community – including the [Biden administration](#), the [US Congress](#), the [European Union](#), and the [United Nations](#) – made clear such action would be unacceptable. Rather than risk international attention and condemnation by expelling Palestinians *en masse*, Israel appears to be pursuing expulsion by other means. This fact sheet details the components of Israel's campaign and their impacts on the Palestinian residents of Masafer Yatta.

THE CAMPAIGN TO MAKE PALESTINIANS' LIVES UNSUSTAINABLE IN MASAFER YATTA

1) Dispossession and Resource Deprivation

- **Demolitions:** Since the High Court decision, Israel has demolished homes in several Masafer Yatta villages, including [al-Fakhit](#), [al-Markaz](#), and [a-Rakeez](#), leaving families homeless. Following the Court's ruling, it is legally impossible for the Masafer Yatta villages to get required Israeli approvals of master plans for development and construction. Building permits are impossible to obtain and demolition orders are ubiquitous. The entire village of [Khalat ad-Daba'a](#) is under threat of [imminent demolition](#) following a September 2022 [Israeli High Court decision](#). Demolition of the village would displace 83 people, 48 of whom are children. Denied permission to build above ground by Israeli authorities, some residents of Masafer Yatta have reverted to [living in caves](#).



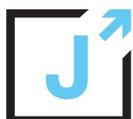
Masafer Yatta, Oct 31, 2022. (South Hebron Hills Watch)

- **Education:** Since schools reopened in August, the Israeli military has [detained teachers and students at checkpoints](#), sometimes preventing them from reaching school. Vehicles have been confiscated, and some children must take longer, more dangerous routes to school, arriving an [hour late on average](#). Some parents have begun sending their children to school in a [nearby town](#), where they stay with relatives during the week. All four schools in Masafer Yatta are under active [demolition orders](#).



Masafer Yatta. (Alyona Synenko, ICRC)

- **Agriculture and Livelihood:** Palestinian shepherds are [prevented from accessing their grazing lands](#), sometimes driven away by Israeli soldiers and at other times by settlers from nearby outposts who graze their own flocks on Palestinian land (with IDF backing). Farming communities suffer from [agricultural attacks by settlers](#), including chopping down olive trees and destroying crops.
- **Water Supply:** Barred by the Israeli Civil Administration from connecting to the state water system (to which nearby illegal Israeli settlement outposts are able to connect), Masafer Yatta residents have attempted to [construct their own pipelines](#). Israeli authorities have [targeted this infrastructure](#), including by cutting pipes and demolishing cisterns. Masafer Yatta residents are forced to [purchase water at high prices](#) and face difficulty transporting it due to poor road conditions. Lack of water has [decreased livestock productivity](#) and increased miscarriage rates among sheep.
- **Electrical Power:** As with water, Palestinian villages are [denied connection](#) to the Israeli electrical grid. Most residents [rely on solar panels funded by international donors](#). Israeli authorities have seized [electric generators](#) and issued [demolition orders](#) for solar panels.
- **Automobile Confiscation:** Teachers, local residents, human rights activists, and NGOs have all had their [cars confiscated](#) since the Israeli High Court's decision in May. Many residents have switched to using [donkeys for transportation](#).
- **Freedom of Movement:** Restrictions on movement have sharply curtailed the ability of Masafer Yatta residents to live normal lives, with [military checkpoints](#) at the entrance to individual villages imposing severe delays. Israel's High Court has [given a green light](#) for the IDF to seize Palestinian-owned land in order to construct a military patrol road in Masafer Yatta. It will cut off the shortest route connecting Masafer Yatta to the nearest



urban center (Yatta) and seriously hamper access by Palestinian farmers and shepherds to their agricultural and grazing land in the southwestern corner of Masafer Yatta.

2) Violence and Threat of Physical Harm

- **Live-Fire Exercises:** While Israel had not held military exercises in Masafer Yatta for roughly twenty years, pending the High Court’s decision on whether it could expel Palestinian residents, the Israeli military [resumed live-fire training drills](#) following the verdict. In at least one instance, a [bullet hit a home](#), in the village of Khalat ad-Daba’a. Military exercises have [left behind unexploded shells](#) and bullet casings.

- **Settler Violence:** Often while attempting to farm their land, Palestinians are subject to [attacks by settlers](#) from nearby settlements and outposts. Settlers are sometimes [escorted by Israeli soldiers](#). In a recent case, Hafez Hureini and other [Palestinian farmers were attacked](#) by armed settlers on private Palestinian land near the firing zone. Both of Hureini’s arms were broken in the attack, during which he defended himself. The settler perpetrators went free; Hureini was arrested on suspicion of committing attempted murder.



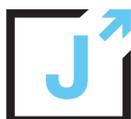
Mizpe Yair outpost, June 10, 2022. (Oren Ziv)

3) Intimidation and Isolation

- **Surveillance:** In June, Israeli soldiers [went from house to house](#) in most communities in the firing zone to document who was living in each house, taking photos of residents and their ID cards.
- **Humanitarian Organizations:** [Aid workers have been detained](#) for several hours at checkpoints and had their ID cards and cars confiscated. Blocking humanitarian organizations from reaching villagers deprives these Palestinians of basic services (especially as resource deprivation and measures limiting agricultural livelihoods has made Masafer Yatta residents more dependent on outside aid for survival). It also limits documentation of human rights violations.
- **Journalists:** Entry of journalists into the Firing Zone is [severely restricted](#). When detained at a “flying checkpoint,” [one journalist was told](#) that entering the firing zone is illegal because it “belongs to the army.”



Checkpoint, Sept. 17, 2022. (South Hebron Hills Watch)

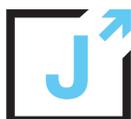




Khalat ad-Daba'a village, Masafer Yatta. (Nadav Weiman)

KEY RESOURCES ON MASAHER YATTA:

- [J Street Policy Center](#), “Israeli Firing Zones and Displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank,” Issue Brief no. 1, July 2022.
- Raja Abdulrahim, “Resisting Israeli Efforts to Displace Them, Palestinians Move Into Caves,” [The New York Times](#), October 22, 2022.
- Bethan McKernan, “‘Every Day Is Worse Than the One Before’: A Palestinian Community Fights for Survival,” [Guardian](#), September 28, 2022.
- Hagar Shezaf, “Life in an IDF Firing Zone: For These Palestinians, It’s a Daily Nightmare,” [Haaretz](#), September 21, 2022.
- [BBC \[video\]](#), “The Palestinians Facing Mass Eviction in the West Bank,” August 29, 2022.
- Steve Hendrix and Shira Rubin, “Ahead of Biden visit, Israel launches biggest eviction of Palestinians in decades,” [Washington Post](#), May 22, 2022.
- [B’Tselem](#) - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, “Incidents in Masafer Yatta (‘Firing Zone 918’), June - September 2022.”
- [Bimkom](#) - Planners for Planning Rights, “Firing Zone 918: Firing Zones as Tools for Settlement Expansion,” October 2022.
- [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#), “Fact sheet: Masafer Yatta communities at risk of forcible transfer,” June 2022.
- [Bicameral Congressional Letter to Secretary Blinken](#) on Potential Eviction of Palestinians from Masafer Yatta, May 26, 2022.
- [Letter from 15 Pro-Israel Groups to President Biden](#) Urging Him to Oppose Forced Displacement of Masafer Yatta Palestinians, July 11, 2022.



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