



ISSUE BRIEF: DEMOLITIONS OF PALESTINIAN SCHOOLS IN THE WEST BANK

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What is the status and impact of Israeli demolitions of Palestinian schools in the occupied West Bank?

- Israeli authorities [demolished an elementary school](#) in the West Bank village of Jubbet adh-Dhib near Bethlehem on May 7. The [EU-funded](#) school served roughly [60 students](#) in grades 1-4 and was [built](#) on privately owned Palestinian land.
- From 2010-2022, Israeli authorities conducted 36 “[demolition incidents](#)” at 20 schools. This includes the [Isfey al-Fouqa school](#) in [Masafer Yatta](#), in the area designated by Israel as Firing Zone 918. It was [demolished twice in 2022](#), impacting over 85 students.
- School demolitions contribute to Palestinian children [dropping out of school](#), worsening a “coercive environment that leaves many Palestinians throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with little option but to leave their homes and communities.” They also impact [childrens’ mental health](#), leading to depression, anxiety, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Are additional Palestinian schools in the West Bank at risk?

- [57 additional schools](#) are at risk for demolitions, of which 49 are in [Area C](#) (the 60 percent of the West Bank under full Israeli control) and 8 are in East Jerusalem. [Geographically](#), there are significant concentrations of at-risk schools in the South Hebron Hills (including Masafer Yatta) and in the central West Bank, an area coveted by settlers who want to prevent the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian state.
- These at-risk schools [serve at least 6,400 students](#), according to the 2022 State Department Human Rights Report. They are under full or partial demolition order or have received stop work orders. At least six schools have [exhausted](#) legal avenues of appeal.

Why does Israel demolish Palestinian schools in the West Bank?

- Powerful settler organizations push to demolish Palestinian construction in Area C, including schools, that lack building permits. At the forefront is [Regavim](#), an NGO co-founded by far-right Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who effectively has [become](#) the first Israeli civilian governor of the occupied West Bank, with the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) under his authority.

- Palestinians in Area C build essential structures without permits because it is [nearly impossible to obtain](#) them from the ICA. From 2016 to 2020, the ICA rejected 99.1 percent of Palestinian requests for building permits. There has been a [consistent increase in demolitions](#) of Palestinian structures in recent years, with 2022 having the highest number in the last six years.
- Regavim [maintains](#) that “Israel’s national lands and resources” include the West Bank and works to “protect” them by waging a “[Battle for Area C](#)” and thwarting the creation of a Palestinian “[terrorist state in the Land of Israel](#).” (Smotrich has [stated](#) his rationale for demolishing the village of [Khan al-Ahmar](#) in the same terms.) Regavim closely [monitors](#) Palestinian building in Area C, brings it to the attention of the ICA, and pushes Israeli authorities to demolish the “illegal” construction – including through the court system.
- School construction is a Palestinian [weapon](#) in the “Battle for Area C,” in Regavim’s view. Its activities include petitioning Israeli courts to demolish unauthorized Palestinian schools, as it did successfully in the case of the [Jubbet adh-Dhib elementary school](#).

How do Israeli demolitions of Palestinian schools violate international law?

- It is illegal for an occupying power to demolish the property of the population it occupies in most cases. Per [Article 53](#) of the Fourth Geneva Convention (GC IV): “Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property...is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations.”
- International law also defines an occupying power’s obligations toward children in the territory it occupies. [Article 50 \(GC IV\)](#) states that it must “facilitate the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children.” Schools “[are to be protected](#)” and the occupier must “facilitate the proper working of children’s institutions ... not only to avoid interfering with their activities, but also to support them actively...”
- Israel is a [signatory](#) to the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). The International Court of Justice has [ruled](#) that the Convention applies to children in the West Bank, [obligating](#) Israel to respect the right to education and ensure that primary and secondary education are available and accessible to every child there. In its last [review](#) of Israeli compliance with the Convention, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child called on Israel to “cease attacks against schools ... and immediately declare a moratorium on the destruction of schools in the OPT [Occupied Palestinian Territory] and in the Negev.”

What steps should the Biden Administration take?

- Support European donor countries' [claims for compensation](#) from Israel for Israeli demolition of schools and other foreign aid-funded structures.
- Make clear that within international fora, the United States will not block accurate criticism of Israel for demolishing schools, homes, and other Palestinian structures, and for other acts of de facto annexation in the West Bank.
- Investigate whether any US-origin military equipment has been used in connection with demolitions of schools and other Palestinian structures in the West Bank and — if so — determine whether such use constitutes a violation of US arms export control law.