

OCCUPIED LIVES: THE RISK OF FORCIBLE TRANSFER OF PALESTINIANS IN **HEBRON**

MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES

AUGUST 2024



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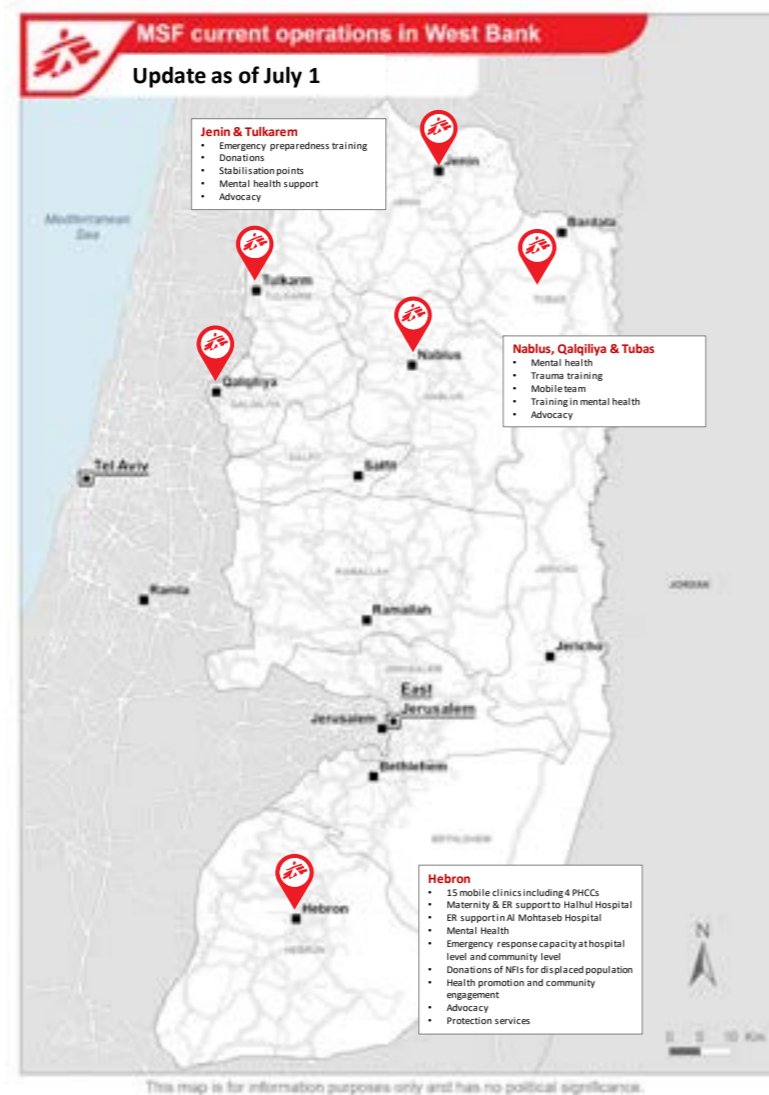
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About Médecins Sans Frontières:

An international, independent medical humanitarian organisation, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) translates to Doctors without Borders. We provide medical assistance to people affected by conflict, epidemics, disasters, or exclusion from healthcare. Our teams are made up of tens of thousands of health professionals, logistic and administrative staff - bound together by our charter. Our actions are guided by medical ethics and the principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality. We are a non-profit, self-governed, member-based organisation. MSF was founded in 1971 in Paris by a group of journalists and doctors. Today, we are a worldwide movement of nearly 63,000 people.

MSF in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT):

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 1989. The international humanitarian medical organization provides medical and psychosocial assistance to facilitate access to healthcare services for Palestinians living under ongoing occupation and blockade. In the West bank, MSF teams are providing primary health care and mental health support, supporting maternity and emergency room capacity as well as hospitals with capacity building trainings, and donations. MSF teams are also providing trainings to volunteer paramedics and providing group sessions and psychological first aid in the communities. MSF is working in Jenin, Tulkarem, Nablus, Qalqilyah, Tubas and Hebron area.



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Executive Summary

The escalating deadly violence and forced displacement in the West Bank over the past two years has been making life in the West Bank unbearable. The year 2022 marked an alarming milestone, with the highest number of Palestinians in the West Bank killed since the United Nations began systematic tracking in 2005. This disturbing trend includes a sharp increase in frequency and intensity of settler attacks, the demolition and seizure of Palestinian homes and infrastructure, leading to the largest number of displaced Palestinians since 2016.

As the lives of Palestinians living in the West Bank have become more dangerous, Israel's disproportionate response¹ to the 7 October devastating and deadly attack by Hamas, and other Palestinian militant groups, has extended beyond Gaza, marking a further inflection point in the West Bank. There, Palestinians are now enduring an unprecedented wave of coercive measures and violence, including systematic and severe movement restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities. Financial hardship has become pervasive and is exacerbated by the combined effects of halting work permits, barriers to freedom of movement, and attacks on livelihoods.

Following 7 October, the Israeli authorities implemented wide scale movement restrictions, including full closures of towns and cities, resulting in severe barriers for Palestinians to access essential services including healthcare. Movement barriers, financial hardship impacting ability to purchase medication and cancellation of health insurance, closure of Ministry of Health (MoH) clinics due to restrictions imposed by Israeli forces, attacks on and obstructions of Palestinian ambulances, and medication rupture in pharmacies all negatively impact Palestinians' access to healthcare.

Physical violence by both the Israeli army and settlers has increased in intensity and frequency across the West Bank, especially targeting Palestinians in refugee camps and Area C, an area under full Israeli military administration. Despite their responsibilities as an occupying power, Israeli authorities' have failed to meet their obligations to prevent the expansion of illegal settlements or to address increasing settler violence. In Hebron, Palestinians face frequent and intense physical violence, reduced access to medical care, forcing changes in health-seeking behaviors, and adaptations to diet due to financial hardship. These factors collectively devastate people's physical health and well-being.

Restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities impact all aspects of the lives of Palestinians living in the West Bank. This increasingly coercive environment has a demonstrably negative impact on the mental health of Palestinians. In addition to the physical violence and violent threats, MSF's patients' health is impacted by the structural violence directly linked to the Israeli Forces' excessive "security measures". Psychological trauma, physical injuries, loss of livelihood, and loss of access to fundamental basic necessities, such as water and livelihoods, have become an everyday reality for too many Palestinians.

The oppressive conditions not only negatively impact mental and physical health, but it is also precipitating Palestinians to flee their homes in what may amount to forcible transfer. Forcible transfer of a population from an occupied territory is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention. While alarming before, since 7 October, forced displacement further escalated at a shocking rate.

Not only are Israeli authorities' practices possibly grave breaches of international law, but they are also inflicting immense and unnecessary suffering on Palestinians.

¹ In International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the term "disproportionate" refers to an attack that may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated from that specific attack. MSF uses the term "disproportionate" based on the extreme level of harm to civilians and devastation of civilian infrastructure, including the health care system, that we have observed in Gaza. This level of harm and devastation exceeds what we have seen in similar urban conflict settings.

The Scope And Methodology Of The Report

MSF has been providing medical and mental health services via mobile clinics to the residents of the South Hebron Hills since 2021, and mental healthcare in Hebron Governorate, including H2², since 1996. Despite remaining underreported in the media, Palestinians in Hebron have been subjected to increased violence and coercive actions. MSF teams witnessed first-hand the impact of the increasingly coercive and oppressive environment on Palestinians' health and has been raising the alarm on forced displacement in Masafer Yatta³, settler attacks in the West Bank⁴ and military raids on Jenin⁵ throughout 2022 and 2023.

Since 7 October, the increased movement restrictions and escalation of violence has hindered Palestinians' access to healthcare, harmed their mental and physical health, and caused an increased number of Palestinian families to flee their villages. In response, MSF teams have scaled-up activities by increasing new mobile clinics from five to 15 locations to reach displaced communities and communities cut off from care. They shared their stories with us, which are reflected in this report.

Qualitative and quantitative data collected between June 2023 and April 2024 were used to inform this report, including:

- Individual interviews and focus group discussions with Palestinians in Hebron Governorate (H2, Jinba, al Jwaya, Susiya, Mirkez, al Majaz, Umm Qussa, Umm al Kheir, Khallet Athaba, Imneizil, Shi'b al Butum, Umm Fagarah, Ar Rakeez, Tha'lah, Khashem al Kareem, Arab ar Rashayida al Barriya, Bani Na'im, Sa'ir, Ash Shuyukh, al Ganoub; including but not limited to MSF patients).
- Interviews with MSF medical and non-medical staff in Hebron.
- Testimonies from medical volunteers of al Aroub refugee camp and al Fawwar refugee camp.
- MSF's anonymized records of mental health data.
- MSF assessment/reports on its operational response to displaced populations and to barriers to accessing healthcare in Hebron Governorate.



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Fatima* (left) came with her granddaughter to the mobile clinic set up by MSF in Umm Qussa in South Hebron Hills, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories. She was one of the first ones to arrive that day. It is her first medical consultation for the past nine months.

² H2 area is an enclave under Israeli authority and home to approximately 700 settlers who live in close proximity to Palestinian residents
³ <https://www.msf.org/health-impact-israeli-measures-forcibly-evict-residents-masafer-yatta>
⁴ [Palestinians face harassment and violence from settlers in West Bank | MSF](https://www.msf.org/palestinians-face-harassment-and-violence-from-settlers-in-west-bank)
⁵ <https://msf.org.uk/article/west-bank-msf-treats-wounded-during-large-scale-military-raid-jenin-camp>; <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/msf-condemns-denial-medical-access-israeli-military-raid>

Context

Deadly violence and forced displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank has been escalating during the last two years. 2022 was the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since the United Nations (UN) started systematically recording fatalities in 2005.⁶ In addition to a sharp increase in fatalities, there was also an increase in number and intensity of settler attacks, and the demolition and seizure of Palestinian infrastructure and homes, leading to the highest number of displaced Palestinians since 2016 (see table 1).

The number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank and Israel by Israeli forces in the first eight months of 2023 had already surpassed the total number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in all of 2022. Moreover, during the same period, a total of 705 Palestinians were injured with live ammunition by Israeli forces in the West Bank, which is almost double the equivalent period in 2022.⁷ While there had been a significant deterioration in the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank in 2022 and 2023, Israel's disproportionate response¹ to the deadly attack by Hamas on 7 October was not limited to Gaza, but also marked a further inflection point in the West Bank. Since then, Palestinians in the West Bank have faced a wave of violence by the Israeli state, including systematic and severe movement restrictions. According to OCHA, from 7 October to 30 April, 475 Palestinians in the West Bank were killed (457 by soldiers, 10 by settlers, 8 unknown/disputed); 53 Palestinians were killed in Hebron Governorate. During the same period, 6 Israeli soldiers and 4 Israeli settlers were killed in the West Bank by Palestinians; zero Israelis were killed in Hebron Governorate⁶.

Israeli authorities implemented wide scale movement restrictions such as fixed checkpoints, 'flying checkpoints', concrete boulders, earth mounds, and curfews, closing almost all entrances to Palestinian villages and towns to vehicular access and disconnected Palestinian cities and towns from main roads, resulting in severe barriers in access to healthcare.⁸ Across the West Bank, physical violence by both the Israeli army and settlers has increased in intensity and frequency, especially targeting Palestinians in refugee camps and Area C, an area under full Israeli military administration.⁹



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Primary health care consultations in MSF mobile clinic in Masafer Yatta, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories, where Palestinians access to health care has gotten more difficult as restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities are impacting movement.

⁶ Data on casualties | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (ochaopt.org)

⁷ Protection of Civilians Report | 8-21 August 2023 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (ochaopt.org)

⁸ Flash report on the human rights situation in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, 7 October - 20 November 2023 | OHCHR

⁹ Under the Oslo accords and subsequent agreements, 'Area C' of the occupied West Bank became under full Israeli military administration in the 1990s. While this agreement was supposed to end in 1999, it never came to its conclusion. As a result, the area remains under the civil and military control of Israel. Area C is the only contiguous territory in the West Bank. For a full overview of area A, B, and C in the West Bank: <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-access-restrictions-may-2023>

Barriers To Healthcare: Impact Of Increasing Movement Restrictions And Attacks To Healthcare

Female patient and South Hebron Hills resident: "We have to smuggle food for ourselves and the herd by car at night to have access to food, like it is something illegal. A car brings food on Thursday during the night and is supported by a network of six people who coordinate and send messages to avoid the Israeli forces. It is very risky and expensive because we have to pay for the transport and diesel and it's a long way."

Female patient and H2 resident: "Life has completely stopped. There is no life. I cannot leave my house to go to work or even to buy basic items for the house. I can't even stand or look out of my window. My children cannot leave to go to school or university."

Male patient and H2 resident: "Most of the time it is forbidden to stand at the window. They start cursing and insulting us if we try to leave the house. I was standing at the window, and when the settler saw me, he went and complained to the soldiers. The soldiers stormed my house and destroyed everything in it."

Male patient in South Hebron Hills: "When the soldiers come at night for home incursions. My children and wife hide behind me for protection, but I cannot protect them. They have the power, they can do whatever they want."

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) framework

As an occupying power, Israel has a specific set of obligations under IHL. Article 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention requires Israel, 'to the fullest extent of the means available to it', to ensure and maintain medical services and hospitals in the occupied territory, in cooperation with the local authorities. Medical personnel must be exempt from measures, such as movement restrictions, which would interfere with the performance of their duties.¹⁰ Recognising this obligation, the Israeli Supreme Court has held that ambulances must be able to move around freely to respond to calls for assistance, even when curfews are imposed.¹¹



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Palestinians on their way back to their homes after visiting MSF mobile clinic in the Al-Majaz community in Masafer Yatta, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories.

¹⁰ ICRC Commentary 1958, on Article 56

¹¹ Association of Israeli-Palestinian Physicians for Human Rights, the Supreme Court of Israel (per President Shamgar), as cited in Dinstein 'The International Law of Belligerent Occupation', p 190

In 2023, prior to 7 October, the World Health Organization (WHO) published a report detailing the barriers to access to healthcare in the West Bank, including physical obstacles on the road (including checkpoints and other road barriers), health workers and patients prevented access, delay or prevention of access to ambulances, and attacks on healthcare.¹² Since 7 October, receiving and providing healthcare has become increasingly challenging, especially in remote villages, refugee camps and H2. Furthermore, movements of Palestinians from the West Bank have been restricted as Israel halted their permits to enter Israel and occupied East Jerusalem, including for medical reasons and access for locally-hired humanitarian staff.

Movement restrictions

The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) and Palestinian NGOs are increasingly blocked by barriers, including checkpoints and car confiscations, keeping them from reaching remote villages and resulting in no access to scheduled vaccinations for babies and children. To reach otherwise isolated villages, MSF expanded the reach of its mobile clinics from four to ten villages in South Hebron Hills and started supporting the MoH with vaccinations in remote villages. Due to roadblocks, MSF is only able to reach some villages by four-wheel drive cars through olive groves.

Medical volunteers from al Aroub refugee camp shared with MSF that Israeli forces stop ambulances for one or two hours at the checkpoint or force them to take alternative roads. This severely delays the time it takes for the ambulance to reach injured patients and subsequently delays the patients' arrival to the hospital. In the case of medical emergencies, this has cost patients their life.

Movement restrictions, financial hardship impacting ability to purchase medication and cancellation of health insurance, closure of MoH clinics due to restrictions imposed by Israeli forces, and medication rupture in pharmacies all negatively impact Palestinians' access to healthcare. Teams at MSF's mobile clinic witness how patients with chronic illnesses face an increase in barriers to access their medication and consequently have no choice but to utilise negative coping mechanisms such as spacing out medication and switching to different medication.



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An MSF mobile clinic in al al Majaz in Masafer Yatta, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories, where MSF provides primary health and mental health services.

All MoH health clinics inside H2 were closed for two months after 7 October, thereafter, only one MoH clinic was able to open as most MoH health care providers did not have permission to cross the checkpoint into H2. Emergency services,

¹² WHO 2022-2023 report - Right to Health: Barriers to health and attacks on health care in the occupied Palestinian territory.

including Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) ambulances, have experienced substantial delays, with wait times averaging between 60–90 minutes at the checkpoints.¹³ MSF had been operating a mobile clinic in the Jaber neighbourhood in H2, but when MSF tried to open this clinic after 7 October, MSF's patients faced harassment, detention, and physical violence causing injuries on their way to the clinic. **MSF decided to close the clinic as it was endangering patients trying to reach the clinic.** As alternative, MSF opened a mobile clinic close to Jaber neighbourhood outside the checkpoint. In theory, patients who had a paper stating they were MSF's patients would be allowed to cross the checkpoint outside curfew hours, but still only during a defined timeframe. In practise, most patients could not reach us.

By 14 November, MSF opened a mobile clinic in Tel Rumeida neighbour in H2. However, patients from Jaber could not reach this clinic. Only a few young patients reached the clinic by using alternative routes and backstreets, jumping walls, fences, or roofs, all to avoid main streets where they are more vulnerable to violence by Israeli forces or settlers. At the clinic they expressed fear and anxiety, some patients arrived shaking and sweating. As the Palestinian MoH is still blocked from providing medical care in Tel Rumeida as of April 2024, MSF provides support by bringing an MoH pharmacist who provides medication to patients with chronic illness on a weekly basis into H2.

For over five months, starting early December, the Israeli authorities blocked MSF from operating a regular mobile clinic in Jaber in H2 citing 'security concerns'. On 15 May 2024, Israeli authorities allowed MSF to provide medical care in Jaber again. In H2, patients with chronic illnesses report not being able to access their medication.

Female patient and South Hebron Hills resident in her 60s: "Four months ago, I was stung by a scorpion. It was around midnight. Because there were no cars to bring me to the hospital, my husband tried to bring me to the hospital with a tractor. The tractor was stopped at the checkpoint, because the soldiers thought it was suspicious that we were travelling at night. My husband explained that I was stung by a scorpion and that it was a medical emergency. They brought me to the military base, but my husband was not allowed to come. I was more scared of the soldiers than of the scorpion bite. They were all surrounding me in the ambulance and they had weapons. I was terrified because they are Israeli soldiers, I am a woman, I was alone, and I was restricted [tied to a medical stretcher]. They were saying vulgar words in Arabic, like 'your mother's vagina' and other sexual comments. This made me more scared of what they might do. They took care of me at the military base. It seemed like they tried to bring me to a Jerusalem hospital, but when they realised I only have a West Bank ID card, this was not an option. A Palestinian ambulance never came, I don't know why. I started to feel very tired and sick, and I wanted to go back to the checkpoint to ask my son to bring me to the hospital. But my son was not allowed to pass the Susya checkpoint. The Israeli military car/ambulance brought me to the Susya checkpoint and then my son brought me to the hospital. The sun was rising already when I finally arrived [around 6am]." [it took approximately six hours to reach hospital]

South Hebron Hills resident and mother: "One month ago, my neighbours' [7-year-old] son broke his arm. His father, uncle [20 years old], and brother [15 years old] went by car to take him to a hospital. Settlers stopped them on the road. They put obstacles on the road so they could not continue and held the brother and uncle hostage. The settlers threatened 'if you do something wrong, or if you don't come back fast enough, we will kill them'. They had to go all the way around on the dirt road, and they held the uncle and brother all this time. They pointed guns at them, handcuffed them, hit them, and said 'if you move, we will kill you.'"

Female MSF staff and H2 resident: "There are no clinics operating within the closed area currently, and even if there were, residents live in fear of the idea of losing their lives for medicine. You can't get sick here, it's not allowed."

¹³ OCHA Humanitarian Alert: Intensification of Movement Restrictions in H2 area of Hebron city, 3 January 2024

Attacks to healthcare

As of 7 May 2024, WHO reported 447 attacks on healthcare in the West Bank since 7 October 2023, a significant increase.¹⁴ MoH requested MSF's support to provide healthcare in Susiya and Shi'b al Butum—South Hebron Hill communities who are at imminent risk of forced displacement. The MoH had been unable to reach these villages since 7 October and the villages were completely isolated as settlers in military uniform blocked the community entrances (including access of water trucks). On 20 November, MSF's mobile clinic team was stopped, harassed, and intimidated by a group of men in military uniform, and was unable to reach the villages. By the end of November, following an intervention by the Israeli District Coordination and Liaison Office (DCL) and the civil administration, MSF was able to reach the villages.

Community volunteers from al Fawwar refugee camp, who received basic life support and first aid training from MSF, expressed their dire need for protective gear (i.e. bullet proof vests and helmets) as they report being shot at by Israeli forces while trying to provide lifesaving first aid, illustrating their precarious reality. In al Aroub refugee camp, MSF provided several medical trainings including for airway management and intubation skills, chest injuries and massive haemorrhage, and head and spinal injuries to medical volunteers of al Aroub ambulance centre. The volunteers shared with MSF their various experiences of being shot at while driving the ambulance, before and after 7 October 2023, with and without patients. They showed MSF the bullet holes in the interior and exterior of the ambulance. MSF saw the mark on the folded seat in the ambulance that had blocked a bullet from reaching the nurse after penetrating the ambulance. The medical volunteers told MSF, given Israeli forces damage the medical equipment inside the ambulance both by shooting at the ambulance and by entering and deliberately breaking items, the ambulance crew keep anything that is expensive (for example, ventilator, defibrillator, aspirator) at the medical centre instead of the ambulance.

Volunteer paramedic: "In October, there was an incident just outside the entrance of the [al Aroub] camp, at the roundabout, a man was shot. We tried to reach him with the ambulance, but we were blocked at the gate [the gate is dozens of meters from the roundabout]. Another ambulance from Beit Ummar tried to reach the injured man from the other direction but was also blocked. He was left bleeding to death for one hour. Maybe if we had reached him, we might have saved him."

Volunteer nurse: "Last October a man died because the ambulance was not able to bring him to the hospital, for two hours there was no way out of the [al Aroub] camp. Since 7 October, the entrance is closed, so all cases are delayed for about two hours."

Volunteer nurse: "We are not only being blocked from saving lives, we are being shot at while trying to save lives."

Volunteer paramedic: "On 5 January we were driving in al Aroub [without a patient] when we suddenly heard a very loud sound inside the ambulance. At first, I did not know the bullet hit the ambulance. I stopped the ambulance in the middle of the road, got out, looked around, and then discovered the bullet hole in the back of the ambulance. I saw the oxygen tank, the bullet passed the oxygen tank by one centimetre. If the bullet had hit the tank, the whole ambulance would have exploded. I saw the folded seat with the bullet in the metal part. I looked at my colleague, we were in shock because we were supposed to be dead. We did not believe we were still alive. After this, we changed the location of the oxygen tank."

Volunteer nurse: "Not everyone is brave enough to work in an ambulance. I have the knowledge and capability to save lives. I cannot have this ability and not use it."

¹⁴ WHO oPt Emergency Situation Update, issue 30, 7 October 2023 to 8 May 2024

Violence Against Civilians and Civilian Structure

Similar attacks have been caught on camera/CCTV footage and widely circulated online¹⁵, documented in detail by WHO¹⁶, and have been directly observed by MSF at the Ras al-Joura entrance of Hebron on 20 November 2023.¹⁷

IHL framework

According to Article 43 of the Hague Regulations, recognised as customary international law, the occupying power is responsible for ensuring 'public order and safety' in the occupied territory.¹⁸ This includes an obligation to take reasonable steps to prevent and deter criminal activity and undertake prompt and impartial investigations when such incidents occur.

Violence by the Israeli army and settlers has become more frequent, aggressive, and deadly, which is reflected in an unprecedented number of Palestinians in the West Bank killed and injured—shattering all previous records.

West Bank (including East Jerusalem)	2022	2023 (until 7 October)	7 October onwards
Fatalities	154 (37 children) ⁶	199 (41 children) ⁶	480 (116 children; 15/05/2024) ¹⁹
Injured	10,180 ⁶	9,000 ⁶	5,040 (15/05/2024) ¹⁹
Palestinians injured with live ammunition	750 ⁶	787 ⁶	1,714 (15/05/2024) ¹⁹
Settler attacks ²⁰	856 ²¹	855 ²²	848 (15/05/2024) ¹⁹
Attacks to healthcare	187 ²³	190 ²⁴	447 (15/05/2024) ¹⁴
Demolition / Seizure of Palestinian structures ²⁵	954	752	874 (13/05/2024)
Forced Displacement	1,032 ²⁵	1,188 ²⁵	3,335 (15/05/2024) ¹⁹

Table 1: Secondary data on increasing violence in the West Bank

¹⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhGBJB28r_E; Israeli forces block medics trying to help injured Palestinians | Al Jazeera Newsfeed (youtube.com); Israeli army prevents ambulances from reaching wounded Palestinians in occupied West Bank (youtube.com); Israeli soldiers detain Palestinian ambulance at gunpoint during protest in the village of Beit Sira (btselem.org)

¹⁶ WHO EMRO | Palestinian Voices 2022 - 2023 | News | Palestine site

¹⁷ Among the cars blocked at the checkpoint to enter Hebron were two ambulances with flashlights.

¹⁸ Further codified in Article 64 of the Fourth Geneva Convention

¹⁹ Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #166 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (ochaopt.org)

²⁰ Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians, resulting in Palestinian casualties, damage to Palestinian-owned property, or both casualties and damage to property; OCHA: "Cases of harassment, trespass, and intimidation are not included in these statistics when they do not result in damage or casualties, although they too increase the pressure on Palestinians to leave"; The other mass displacement: settlers advance on West Bank herders | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (ochaopt.org)

²¹ Settler-related incidents resulting in Palestinian casualties or property damage; Palestinian Bedouin community seeks safer grounds amid settler violence | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (ochaopt.org)

²² Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #81 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (ochaopt.org)

²³ WHO EMRO | Health attacks oPt 2022 | News | Palestine site

²⁴ As presented by WHO at the private diplomatic briefing in Ramallah on 21 February 2024.

²⁵ Data on demolition and displacement in the West Bank | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (ochaopt.org)

According to UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), of the injuries recorded across the West Bank since 7 October, 33% of those have been caused by live ammunition, compared with 9% in the first nine months of 2023, indicating a stark shift in tactics.²⁶ MSF patients in H2 shared stories of soldiers shooting with live ammunition at young men and houses as well. One patient reported, “they aim weapons at us immediately as we open the house door.” Another patient shared, “there was a young man crossing the road, so the soldiers attacked him, and when my nephew went to defend him, the soldiers tried to shoot my nephew.”



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Demolished shelter in Masafer Yatta, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories.

In South Hebron Hills, community members directly reported to MSF how settlers adopted tactics including destroying homes, agricultural land, mosques, and essential civil infrastructure such as water and livelihood structures, killing and stealing livestock, issuing violent ultimatums for communities to leave, forcing residents at gunpoint to repeat pro-Israel slogans, shooting with live ammunition, placing Israeli flags, and blocking community entrances—even children are not spared from beatings and threats. Settlers in military uniform go by car and quad-bikes from village to village every few days. When the community tries to restore the demolished structures, settlers take revenge by intensifying the violence, including burning houses and psychological assaults. In several locations, residents have started walking in groups of two or three as they fear walking alone is too dangerous. Beyond personal safety, personal property is not safe either. Community members report attacks on water sources, confiscation and/or demolition of solar panels, agricultural structures, homes, furniture, food, and herd. In Susiya and Shi’b al Butum, settlers in military uniform threatened to kill members of the community and physically assaulted them, in addition to demolishing their water tanks, water wells, water pipes, electricity infrastructures, and agricultural structures and trees.

²⁶ Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #110 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (ochaopt.org)

In Um al Kheir, a small village directly adjacent to an expanding Israeli settlement in the north of Masafer Yatta, a key community member reported to MSF how settlers armed with automatic rifles raided their homes, destroyed their belongings, and demolished items in the mosque. Settlers intimidated the community by rounding up all men, taking their phones, pointing their guns at them, beating them with weapons, threatening to kill them and to ‘turn their village into Gaza’. Settlers shamed the community by filming humiliating videos of them and threatening to kill them if they did not put an Israeli flag on their house.

Female patient in H2: “The way they ‘investigate’ men physically is abusive and humiliating.”

Father and MSF patient in South Hebron Hills: “Two settlers forced me and an old man, who is sick and weak, [to walk] from the top of the village to the bottom. They pushed us with their guns, holding their gun to my neck. They were making sounds like they were guiding donkeys. One settler said ‘go’ in Hebrew, and the other responded ‘don’t say that, words are for humans, this is an animal’. I expected him to shoot me if I did anything wrong, like talk to him or turn my head. Imagine if someone can lead you like cattle, they can do anything to you.”

Conversation between Palestinian shepherd and MSF staff:

Shepherd: “After tying my hands, a settler and soldier walked me away from the group, They were talking in Hebrew and did not know I could understand what they were saying, The soldier told the settler, ‘This is an area without camera, so you can do whatever you want. Just do whatever you want and I will sort it out. I can say he threw a rock.’ They started attacking me, The soldier held me by the neck and the settler hit me from behind, The soldier also hit me with his rifle and fists.”

MSF: “What did you think was going to happen?”

Shepherd: “I thought they were trying to intimidate me. I did not think they were going to kill me, because people could still see us.”

Shepherd’s brother: “No, you were scared, you are still scared, whenever you think about it, you scream.”

Mental health

The first month after 7 October was especially violent, which was reflected in the increase in mental health support needed. Up to 149 Palestinians who had experienced violence by Israeli soldiers and/or settlers required psychological first aid from MSF—compared to 78 during the previous month, a 91% increase. As of 7 March 2024, MSF’s mental health team in Hebron has provided counselling and psychotherapy sessions to 125 new survivors of violence by Israeli forces and/or settlers since 7 October, including 54 women and 40 children, some as young as three, four, and five years old. An additional 321 Palestinians (including 29 children and 158 women) who were affected by violence by Israeli forces and/or settlers received psychological first aid from MSF. Of those, 292 were affected by violence by the Israeli forces (91%), 10 by Israeli settlers (3%), and 19 by Israeli forces and settlers (6%). The vast majority, 226 patients, exhibited symptoms of anxiety after experiencing a home incursion.



An MSF staff member speaks to a 70-year-old beneficiary from Al-Majaz community in Masafer Yatta, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories.

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Male patient in South Hebron Hills: “It is not just the lives lost. It is the pain inside.”

Male patient in South Hebron Hills: “Many children suffer from bedwetting and stuttering. We work with them to help them. Imagine, children living in other places, they live in peace and feel comfortable with their family. Then, imagine how children feel here if soldiers demolish their house in front of their eyes, arrest their father four times, and maybe kill his father in front of his eyes. How does this child feel? Everyone is affected.”

MSF female patient in South Hebron Hills: “Each time they come closer and closer. I feel like they are closing into my home. I feel fear and anxiety, even when sleeping. We don’t sleep deeply like normal people, with every sound we wake up and need to investigate what is happening.”

South Hebron Hills male resident: “Life was already difficult before the war, now it is even more difficult. You feel like you’re going to explode, but you cannot do anything. You go to the police, they don’t do anything. Go to the army, they tell you to go home. They are humiliating us, they break everything, and we cannot do anything.”

Grandmother in H2: “One week ago, I allowed my five-year-old granddaughter to go to buy candy. It should have taken her only 10 minutes, but it took her 25 minutes, during this time I was so scared, I was panicking. When she returned, she told me that she saw a group of soldiers and went hiding behind a tree. I was horrified when I heard this. What would have happened if she made a sudden movement? She could have been shot. Maybe it’s wrong or suspicious what she did, but she’s a child.”

While settler violence escalates and is a major contributing factor to forced displacement of Palestinians, Palestinians are predominantly killed and injured by Israeli forces. Since 7 October, according to OCHA, at least 463 Palestinians were killed by Israeli soldiers, compared to ten killed by Israeli settlers¹⁹. According to the same source, in almost half the cases of the recorded settler attacks, Israeli forces accompanied or actively supported the attackers.²²

Explainer: Israeli army and settlers.

Under international law, Israeli settlers in the West Bank are considered civilians belonging to the occupying power. They reside in settlements in the West Bank, which, as established by the International Court of Justice (ICJ)²⁷ and by multiple resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council²⁸, are illegal under international law, but supported and made possible by the Israeli government. This violates Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the occupying power from transferring parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.²⁹

As Israeli settlers are not officially representing the Israeli forces, they often undertake acts which are even more flagrant (e.g., blatant incitement of violence, calls for ethnic cleansing³⁰). These acts are often committed under the protection of the Israeli forces and in a permissive space that is created (i.e. near total impunity). As Israeli human rights organisation Yesh Din reports, between 2005 and 2022, 93% of police investigations into settler attacks against Palestinians were closed without indictments. Furthermore, according to OCHA, in 2023, prior to 7 October, 7.6 times more Palestinians injured by Israeli forces, while they were allegedly protecting settlers, than by settlers themselves.³¹

After 7 October, many settlers joined the Israeli army as reservists. The Israeli police cannot intervene or respond to the attacks carried out by settler ‘reservists’ as they are officially soldiers, further exacerbating the impunity and permissive space for violent attacks. Furthermore, Palestinian community members told MSF that they recognise the faces of the settlers that used to attack and harass them—these same people are now wearing military uniforms, which makes it impossible for Palestinians to know if these settlers are still civilians or are representing the Israeli forces. Therefore, throughout this report, whenever there is a reference to activities conducted by settlers, MSF cannot verify whether the activities are conducted by settlers as civilians (at times in military uniform) or by settlers functioning in their official capacity of Israeli forces. The community started referring to them as soldier-settlers.

As clearly set out by Norwegian Refugee Council’s (NRC) Legal experts, settler violence is attributable to the State of Israel.³² The Israeli government holds responsibility—even for settlers who are not officially part of the army—as Israel 1) allows, supports, promotes, and ‘legalises’ settlements; 2) fails in their preventive duty to regulate the behaviour of its citizens; 3) fails its obligation as an occupying power to provide safety to the Palestinian people; 4) has accompanied or actively supported the attackers; and 5) allows near total impunity for settler violence.

²⁷ <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/131/131-20040709-ADV-01-00-BI.pdf>

²⁸ For example, UN Security Council Resolutions 446 and 452 (1979), Resolution 465 (1980), and Resolution 2334 (2016)

²⁹ Question of the Observance of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 in Occupied Palestinian Territory - Question of Palestine (un.org); Chapter 3: Israeli Settlements and International Law - Amnesty International; Land Grab: Israel’s Settlement Policy in the West Bank | B’Tselem

³⁰ ‘West Bank: Israel Responsible for Rising Settler Violence’ (Human Rights Watch, 17 April 2024) < <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/17/west-bank-israel-responsible-rising-settler-violence> > ;

‘Extremist Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as violent activists, blocking humanitarian aid to Gaza: five individuals and three entities sanctioned under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime’ (European Council, 15 July 2024) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/07/15/extremist-israeli-settlers-in-the-occupied-west-bank-and-east-jerusalem-as-well-as-violent-activists-blocking-humanitarian-aid-to-gaza-five-individuals-and-three-entities-sanctioned-under-the-eu-global-human-rights-sanctions-regime>

³¹ OCHA: “226 Palestinians, including 27 children, were injured by Israeli settlers in the first seven months of 2023” and “1,711 Palestinians, including 202 children, were injured by IF in incidents involving Israeli settlers during the first seven months of 2023”; OCHA Humanitarian Overview covering January to July 2023.

³² NRC’s report on ‘Attribution of Settler Violence to the State of Israel’, published on 14 September 2023

Food Security, Wash, Livelihoods: Impact on Underlying Determinants of Health

South Hebron Hills male resident: "The community tried to stop them [20 settlers who came to the Palestinian village end of October] and threatened to call the soldiers. The settlers responded 'if you want soldiers, we can bring them', and then two settlers came in masks and military gear. The settler-soldiers dress like soldiers, but behave like aggressive settlers. For example, three settlers came to the village the days after 7 October, they were going from door to door, knocking on doors, breaking windows and doors. My father thought it was family knocking and when he went to the door, settlers broke the door open, knocking him down and causing a head injury. They are just doing this to spread terror."

Masafer Yatta male resident: [After 7 of October, more settlers started coming to Shi'b al Butum and the attacks turned more violent and destructive.] "They are settlers, but they are wearing soldier uniforms. This started after the war." [On 19 October, 15 settlers in military uniform attacked the village.] "They used steel bars to beat me and broke three of my bones next to my chest... on the same day, they attacked my neighbour and displaced him. He was unable to return."

H2 male resident: "Since the beginning of the events, all the soldiers in the area have been religious settlers in military uniform."

In addition to the physical violence and violent threats, MSF's patients' health is impacted by the structural violence of the increasingly coercive environment including movement restrictions impacting livelihoods and attacks on civilian infrastructure.

IHL framework

In situations of occupation, both IHL and international human rights law (IHRL) apply. Under a human rights framework, freedom of movement may only be restricted in exceptional circumstances to protect national security, public order, public health or morals and the rights and freedoms of others (Article 12(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights). However, restrictions on freedom of movement must be strictly necessary, proportionate and be the least intrusive measure possible to achieve the desired result.³³



© MIGUEL CALIXTO DEL CORRO
Palestinian teenager finding shelter from the sun after his home was suddenly demolished without warning in Umm al Kheir, Masafer Yatta, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories.

³³ CCPR General Comment No. 27: Article 12 (Freedom of Movement), para 14. Available here < <https://web.archive.org/web/20230601225003/https://www.refworld.org/topic,50ffbc582,50ffbc5c4,45139c394,0,,GENERAL,,html> >

IHL framework

The imposition of severe movement restrictions, including total isolation of towns and extreme curfews, appears to have a disproportionate impact on civilians' lives, in violation of IHRL. Moreover, if such restrictions are intended to punish the civilian population, they may constitute "collective punishment," which is explicitly prohibited under Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This prohibition states that no civilian should be punished for an offense they have not personally committed.

People's access to livelihoods is highly impacted and many have lost their source of income due to severe and systematic movement restrictions, closure of the West Bank, extreme curfews, and isolation of towns. On 7 October, 750 families in Hebron's H2 were placed under a curfew strict enough to resemble house arrest and may amount to collective punishment. After two weeks of full curfew, families were allowed to leave their house on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, for one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. Since the end of 2023 and as of April 2024, H2 residents were allowed to leave their houses between 7am to 7pm, and yet, the implementation of the exact time of the curfew fluctuates from day to day, adding to the unpredictability of their lives.

MSF teams hear frequent reports of food insecurity—in particular among displaced people. In H2, at least 64 families have been denied access to the food kitchen in the Ibrahim Mosque, on which they depend as their main source of food.³⁴ The Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs has requested MSF's support with food parcels for 150 people in H2. In between 7 October and 14 March, MSF provided at least 102 families with food. OCHA distributed emergency food parcels and vouchers to 604 families in Hebron.³⁴ In most South Hebron Hills villages visited by MSF, people speak of financial hardship directly impacting their diet. They report no longer buying fruits and vegetables, and reducing the size and number of meals per day; many are only eating bread dipped in oil.



© MARIAM QABAS

Palestinian community in Jinba, Masafer Yatta, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories. The herding communities are forced to keep their sheep within the community because they cannot go into the mountains due to increased settler attacks and movement restrictions.

³⁴ OCHA'S Humanitarian Alert: Intensification of Movement Restrictions in the H2 area of Hebron City_3 January 2024

Among the 210 people MSF interviewed from 19 different communities in Hebron Governorate during February, March, and April 2024, 39% reported having gone to bed hungry at least once during the previous month. In South Hebron Hills (area C) this number rose to 50%. In some villages like Imneizil, a staggering 77% of the people indicated they have gone to bed hungry at least once, and 41% said this happened up to ten times in a month. Our teams detected shame among the community in admitting they were going to bed hungry (some people even refused to answer the question), and we fear that the data might be an underrepresentation of the reality. While MSF received reports prior to 7 October that people were forced to change their diet due to financial hardship resulting from attacks on their livelihoods, reports of hunger is a new and disconcerting development.

Since May 2023, residents from at least 17 villages in the South Hebron Hills have reported to MSF the specific challenges they faced in **accessing water**. Israeli forces blocked the access of water trucks to their village, and demolished water cisterns (for example, by filling them with concrete). This has led to a reduction in the available water supply. Furthermore, settlers have been reportedly damaged water pipes and tanks, and seized control of water cisterns, exacerbating the water scarcity in an already arid region. MSF has observed the tangible impacts of these actions, including bullet holes in water tanks and destroyed water wells.³⁵ MSF responded by providing water tanks, water pipes and fittings, and other supplies to improve access to water, and latrines to communities and individual households in eight villages.³⁶

The impact of **financial hardship**, caused by barriers to livelihoods, is exacerbated by attacks of Israeli settlers and soldiers on shepherds and their herd, particularly when Palestinian shepherds attempt to access grazing lands. Losing access to natural grazing as a way to feed their herd, shepherds are forced to pay increasing prices for fodder in order to keep their herd alive. All shepherds MSF spoke to, said they had no choice but sell members of their herd to keep the rest alive. When OCHA interviewed Palestinian herding communities in August 2023, in 95% of the 63 communities, residents had sold part of their livestock.³⁷ While necessary for short-term survival of the herd, in the long-term this means shepherds are losing their source of income.

Male patient in South Hebron Hills: "The local village council worked on creating a water network from Yatta to various villages, but the Israeli civil administration and settlers destroyed all water pipes [on 28 September 2023]."

MSF female patient in South Hebron Hills: "People don't have an income anymore, no permit to work in Israel, all the grazing land has been taken over, so they have to buy fodder. The priority is to buy food for the herd and basic things for the house. Some people cannot even buy wood for heating. People barely manage with food for the day, some people don't have enough food to eat, and use corn or frying oil to dip their bread in because they cannot afford olive oil. Fruits and vegetables are a luxury now, like jewelry. Even for people who still have money, because they need the money for the basics."

MSF nursing activity manager: "We provided medical care to a two-month-old baby who got sick after sleeping two nights in neighbour's barrack close to the sheep, while it was very cold and raining constantly, because the family's house was demolished. The baby's health was clearly affected by sleeping outside under such bad weather conditions."

MSF patient and mother in South Hebron Hills: "Sometimes we don't even have eight shekels to buy paracetamol."

³⁵ In addition to injured farm animals and damage to mosques, such as the destruction of interiors and loudspeakers.

³⁶ Other cases were referred to humanitarian actors that were already responding to the affected villages.

³⁷ FactSheet-Displacement-of-Palestinian-herders-Sep-23.pdf (ochaopt.org)



The community's water well demolished by Israeli settlers under the 'protection' of Israeli forces, according to the community. ©MSF



Water tanks with bullet holes, caused by settlers shooting at homes, herd, and water tanks, according to the community. © MSF

As reflected in the data on the escalating violence in the West bank (Table 1) and supported by testimonies from MSF's patients, Palestinians in Hebron Governorate—men, women, children, and elderly—are exposed to more frequent and intense physical violence, have reduced access to medical care, are forced to change their health-seeking behaviours. They are left no choice but to adapt their diet due to financial hardship, and have reduced access to potable water—all factors that are known to negatively impact physical health.

Rapidly Increasing Forced Displacement

IHL framework

Individuals or mass forcible transfers of protected civilians from an occupied territory are prohibited, 'regardless of their motive' (Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 49). As the occupying power, Israel must ensure that the civilian population is protected from forcible transfers. Forcible transfer may constitute a war crime under International Criminal Law (Rome Statute, Article 8 (2)(b)(vii)), or a crime against humanity when carried out as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against the civilian population pursuant to a State or organisational policy (Rome Statute Article 7(2)(d)).

In Hebron Governorate, the forced displacement of Palestinians, mainly herding communities in Area C residing near Israeli settlements, is clearly part of a systematic government policy. This was already evident prior to 7 October when forced displacement was increasing at an alarming rate. In September 2023, OCHA disclosed that the number of Palestinians forcibly displaced from their

homes since 2022 more than doubled compared to previous years³⁸. Just prior to 7 October, OCHA raised the alarm as 13 Palestinian families, amounting to 7% of the Masafer Yatta population, were displaced within just three months, citing movement restrictions imposed by Israeli forces as the primary reason for their move.³⁹ **While alarming before, since 7 October, forced displacement further escalated amid surging movement restrictions and settler violence.** Within the first seven weeks after 7 October, at least 443 Palestinians were forcibly displaced from their villages in Hebron Governorate.⁴⁰ According to UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, there is a “systematic policy of expanding settlements”.⁴¹ According to Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the settlement expansion is further advanced by severe movement restrictions and increased violence by both settlers and the Israeli forces⁴², which MSF observes makes livelihoods of Palestinian farming communities untenable and has caused many families to flee for fear of violence.

The insufferability and dangers of the occupation are an everyday reality for Palestinians in Hebron Governorate, be it home demolitions, home raids in the middle of the night, curfews turning homes and villages into open-air prisons, the inability to provide safety to their children, barriers to healthcare, livelihood and even the most fundamental human necessities such as water. The cumulative impact of these coercive measures is Palestinian communities being pushed out of their homes and away from their land. Herding communities in Area C have directly reported to MSF how settlers have burned their houses, threatened to kill them if they did not leave, pointed rifles at them and their children, shot with live ammunition at or near their homes, closed roads, choked the shepherd’s dogs to death in front of them, killed their baby sheep, and unleashed their dogs on them and their children—triggering people’s forced displacement.



© JUAN CARLOS TOMASI
Safa, a resident of Mirkez in Masafer Yatta, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories, had her home demolished twice in 2022.

38 1,105 people from 28 Communities—about 12 per cent of their population—had been displaced from their areas of residence since 2022. Settler violence and barriers to bringing their herd to grazing land were identified as main drivers of the displacement; Displacement of Palestinian herders amid increasing settler violence | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (ochaopt.org)
39 Thirteen Palestinian families displaced from Masafer Yatta | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (ochaopt.org)
40 Displacement_WB_Nov2023_A4_V6 (002).pdf
41 press_statement_by_un_special_coordinator_mladenov_-_29_july_2016.pdf (unmissions.org)
42 A/HRC/55/72: Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights | OHCHR; A/HRC/55/72 (ohchr.org)

Where prior to 7 October, forced displacement took place in a more organised manner (i.e. people had the chance to pack their personal belongings and had a plan on where they could stay), now, often families are forced to flee suddenly and are forced to leave behind all their property, including personal belongings and official papers, being only able to take what they can carry walking. MSF met displaced families—often with many small children—who lacked access to water, food, and any other essential necessities.

MSF provided mental healthcare, food and material support to affected adults and children when in the village of Shi’b al Butum, where Israeli authorities demolished people’s homes on 22 November. More than four months later, one of the people whose home was demolished still lives in a tent—with water flowing into the tent when it rains—and is subjected to routine violence.⁴³ All but one road to the village is blocked. In January 2023, MSF provided mental health and material support to families in Shi’b al Butum whose homes were demolished for the fourth time in two years. According to West Bank Protection Consortium (WBPC), 25 people (including 13 children) were forcibly displaced from this already tiny village since 7 October.⁴⁴

MSF provided material support including mattresses, blankets and cooking utensils to 651 Palestinians who were either forcibly displaced from their village or whose house or essential personal items were destroyed since 7 October.

After being displaced from their home and village, often people return to, hoping to retrieve the personal belongings they left behind in their sudden flight. Unfortunately, those MSF spoke to generally reported finding their homes demolished and tents burned, including their clothes, furniture, and food. Dishearteningly, families continue to feel unsafe and at risk of forced displacement in the locations they were displaced to as they do not have their own home, continue to face movement restrictions impacting their access to services, continue to be targeted with settler attacks, and are told by Israeli forces they need to move four or five kilometres because they are too close to a military zone.



© JUAN CARLOS TOMASI
Demolished home of Palestinian community in Mirkez, Masafer Yatta, West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories.

43 MSF is currently in the process of seeking referral pathways for improved shelter and legal assistance.
44 West Bank Protection Consortium in multilateral email communication on 15 and 24 November.

Community members from al Gnoub, al Majaz, Shi'b al Butum, Um al Kheir, Tha'lah, Khallet Athaba, Ar Rakeez, Umm Fagarah (South Hebron Hills) shared with MSF how Israeli soldiers and settlers have been entering their homes—also when women are home alone—with large assault rifles, pointing their weapons at them and threatening to kill them if they do not leave the area, claiming “this is our land”.

Nine families (49 people) were displaced from a village in South Hebron Hills. In a focus group discussion with seven mothers, they shared the following.

After 7 October, settlers increased their harassment and attacks on the community.

- “Every day, every night, they came pointing weapons at us and our children. After one week, they burned our house and threatened us into leaving, saying ‘these are not your houses anymore’. Some families left, and for the ones who stayed the harassment got worse. One day, we left the house at night, because we were afraid that they would burn the house with us in it. We slept outside in the rain and returned the next day. We tried to resist.”

The Displacement

- “On 1 November, 30 settlers came with dogs and they released the dogs on us. My two-year-old daughter fell when she was trying to flee from the dogs. Settlers messed around with our stuff in the house and put sheets/covers on top of the baby. We couldn't find him until we saw his legs coming out from under the things, then we discovered him. They killed 10 of our dogs in front of us by choking them. We could not do anything. They threatened us into leaving. We were not allowed to take anything. ‘Everything is ours now’, they said. They kept pointing at their watch to make us hurry, they kept telling us we only had 10 minutes to leave, and they pointed their weapons at us. My husband was trying to defend our house. They said, ‘this is our house, our land’, and they took his jacket and wore it. They threatened to kill him. My daughter took pictures as evidence of what they were doing, but they took her phone and deleted everything.”
- When they fled, some were able to take their cars, and others walked. “We couldn't believe ourselves that they let us leave, we thought they would kill us.” The ones fleeing by car were blocked by many closed roads.

The first week in [area they were displaced to], they stayed outside. There was a stone room, but it was locked.

- “Everything we owned was left behind and taken over by the settlers. Our cars, phones, olive trees, gas canisters, washing machines, refrigerator. The only thing that is ours here are the sheep and their food. We live with 20 people in this room [4x6m, the space is also used as storage for fodder]. We get to stay here until we find a place of our own.”
- “We cook on wood that we collect outside. Yesterday, we did not eat anything. People donated flour, so we were able to bake some bread, but we do not have a lot of other food left. Children eat only bread and tea. There are water wells, but the water is dirty, and it makes children sick. We don't have access to food because they have no money [lost source of income], we had to leave all our food behind, and there are settlers on the road.”

MSF female patient displaced from her village in South Hebron Hills after her home was demolished for the third time: “Soldiers told me ‘if you rebuild, I demolish. If you build again, we will take your children.’ I gave up my land. I don't want to give up my children.”

According to OCHA, 21 families comprising of 116 people, including 38 children, from H2 had no choice but to leave their homes citing heightened access and movement restrictions imposed by Israeli forces, coupled with an increase in search and arrest operations since 7 October 2023.³⁴ Their struggle and motivations are reflected in what community members share with MSF:

H2 female resident: “Many families have moved to H2 outside to protect their women and children. Not all families have the financial means to move. But even if they don't have the money, they ask money from relatives, just to be able to leave. I know four families personally who left. Before 7 October, many things were happening in H2, but no one was leaving, we wouldn't even think about it. Now it's a new phenomenon. Many people are leaving because they want to protect the lives of their women and children. If you open your front door to put the carpet outside or to go out with your children, you find a gun pointed at you. The psychological distress is too much to bear, they cannot stand it, so the mothers pressure their husbands to leave. Even if it is a bad or unhealthy house, people move, just to be safe. Women have concern for their children, for their children's lives. Palestinian women are the strongest in the world, but what is happening now it too much.”

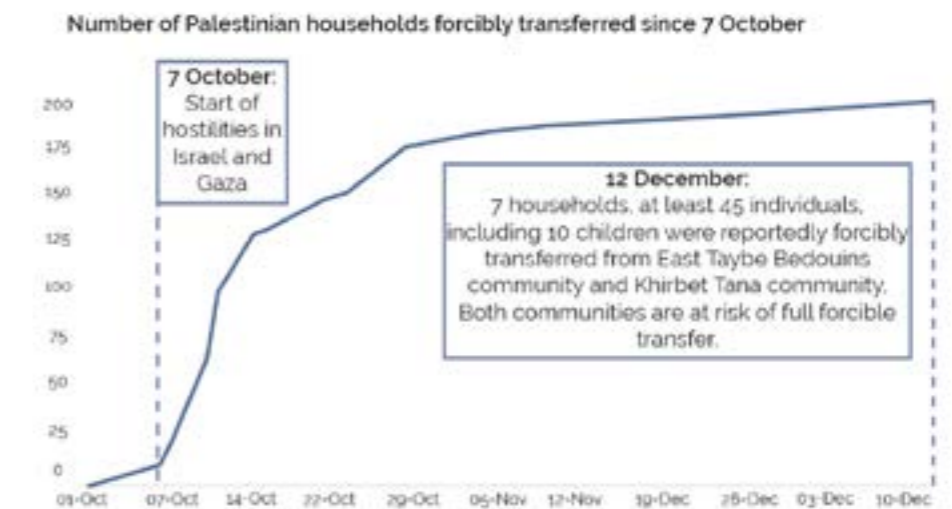


Figure 2: Graph on Number of Palestinian households forcibly transferred since 7 October (WBPC's Factsheet: Forcible transfers of Palestinian communities - 19 December 2023)

The practices of the Israeli forces, including but not limited to severe and systematic movement restrictions and—in what OHCHR has described as—disproportionate violence⁴⁵, combined with the Israeli authorities' failure to meet their duties and obligations regarding the illegal settlements and to hold perpetrators (such as Israeli settlers) accountable, all contribute to an increasingly coercive environment. Psychological trauma, physical injuries, loss or livelihood, and loss of access to fundamental human necessities (for example, water and food) has become an everyday reality for too many Palestinians. This not only negatively impacts mental and physical health, but is also causing Palestinians to flee their homes in what may amount to forcible transfer (i.e. displacement due to coercion). Not only are Israel's practices possibly grave breaches of international law, they are inflicting immense and unnecessary suffering on Palestinians.

⁴⁵ OHCHR Flash report: The human rights situation in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, 27 December 2023

Father in South Hebron Hills: "We are asking for simple rights, but simple rights are like dreams here."

Mother in South Hebron Hills: "We just want to live in safety, that when I close the door of my house, that I feel safe in my house."

Female patient in South Hebron Hills: "Even a simple life, the occupation is not allowing us."

Female patient in H2: "I live in constant fear for my children. When I follow the events in Gaza, I fear that the same thing will happen here."

Urgent Calls

Israeli authorities must:

1. Uphold their obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to ensure and maintain medical services in the occupied territory, to the fullest extent possible. Palestinian communities must be able to move freely to access healthcare; this is critical to ensure access to primary healthcare including routine vaccinations for children and pregnant women and regular care for those with chronic disease and emergency medical care.
2. Refrain from undertaking disproportionate "security measures", which have a demonstrably negative impact on the mental health of Palestinians. In particular, night time home incursions have a severe impact on the mental health of our patients.
3. Stop the use of systematic and severe movement restrictions, which continue to hinder Palestinians' access to healthcare. Guarantee the unimpeded access to healthcare and other essential services, water, and livelihoods.
4. Fulfill their obligation as an occupying power to provide safety to the Palestinian people and their children, this includes protection from settler violence.

The International Community must:

5. Urgently act, beyond mere condemnation, to ensure that the Israeli government
 - complies with its obligations as occupying power under IHL,
 - ensures access to medical care and other essential services,
 - provides safety to Palestinian people and their children including protection from settler violence,
 - protects Palestinians against forced displacement and individual or mass forcible transfer,
 - facilitates the safe return of displaced communities to their homes.

Mother of a family that was forcibly displaced in South Hebron

Hills: *“Every day, every night, they came pointing weapons at us and our children. After one week, they burned our house and threatened us into leaving, saying ‘these are not your houses anymore’. Some families left, and for the ones who stayed the harassment got worse. One day, we left the house at night, because we were afraid that they would burn the house with us in it. We slept outside in the rain and returned the next day. We tried to resist.”*