



Har Homa Israeli settlement built on Palestinian land

of a future Palestinian state.

However, none of these acts solved the problem of the very significant Palestinian presence in Jerusalem. Now, Israel has implemented *The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order)* which denies Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip their right to join their families who are citizens of Israel or residents of occupied East Jerusalem. Tens of thousands of Palestinian families have been divided since the law was implemented in 2003 and since revised and extended until July 2008. No family unification is allowed for Palestinian men between 18 and 35 and for women aged between 18 and 25. Applications by anyone older than that who has engaged in activity that Israel deems hostile to the state (which includes non-violent political protests) will be refused. These are families who have lived and worked within a few kilometres of each other all their lives and now find themselves separated as though they are in a foreign country. According to Amnesty International, this law is “profoundly discriminatory. . . which cannot be justified by genuine security concerns.”

“This Land Is Mine”

The tug-of-war over Jerusalem has spurred Israel on to take as much land as possible from the Palestinians. It has, therefore, escalated its illegal annexation efforts through a complex system of manoeuvres under the

pretext of urban planning and expansion - for Jews only. Over the last four decades, Israel has illegally appropriated over 50 per cent of Palestinian land in the West Bank for the benefit of Jewish settlements, declaring it “state land”. More than 3,400 buildings have been built in these illegal settlements.

When Israel’s Prime Minister Ariel Sharon took office in early 2001, he undertook to dismantle all settlements that he had built in contravention of not only international law, but also Israeli law. In exchange for dismantling these illegal outposts, US President Bush agreed to recognise Israeli “population centres” that had been set up inside the Palestinian West Bank, also in contravention of international law, but not Israeli law. Six years later, not one settlement in the West Bank has been dismantled.

Sharon’s disengagement from Gaza was simply a token display that actually led to increased illegal settlement building in the West Bank and a relocation of the settlers from Gaza with substantial compensation. Not a word of condemnation was uttered by Western leaders, but there was plenty of praise for Sharon’s “courage”. Nothing has changed since Prime Minister Olmert took over. More than 952 tenders for new housing units inside the West Bank have been approved and now Olmert seeks to connect the biggest settlement Ma’ale Adumim to Jerusalem by annexing even more land. This demographic re-structuring of Jerusalem is deliberately designed to

cut Palestinians off from Jerusalem and gives, what is effectively ethnic cleansing by stealth, the veneer of legality.

And Houses Come Tumbling Down

In order to effect land clearing for new or expanded Israeli settlements, as well as the Wall, Israel uses one of its most lethal weapons – the bulldozer. A familiar sight, the specially-constructed bulldozer arrives with barely a moment’s notice and begins tearing down the family home, crushing everything inside. There is no time to save clothes, furniture, toys, books, photographs and when the dust settles, the traumatised family is reduced to finding shelter with friends until the family is issued with a UN aid tent.

To lose the family home is always devastating, but for children to see their homes demolished in such cruel and senseless ways is psychologically devastating. Yet, Palestinian children are somehow expected to deal with such arbitrary violence regularly.

The 18,000 homes already destroyed since 1967 have left some 200,000 Palestinians homeless – many of them for the second, third or even fourth time and none of them have been compensated for the loss of their homes, furnishings and personal items. Israel justifies these demolitions on the basis that they have been built without a permit on land that Israel has zoned as agricultural land according to a British plan (RJ-5) formulated in 1942, then used to freeze Palestinian building works. Family homes are also destroyed as a form of collective punishment if a Palestinian is accused of committing a terrorist act against Israel whether the family is involved or not. On both counts, it denies Palestinians the fundamental right to respect for private and family life and home.

Starving Them Out

And just when the Palestinians thought it could not get any worse, sanctions were imposed on the Palestinians last year which absolutely crippled the Palestinian economy and plunged ordinary Palestinian families into the sort of poverty that has forced many to raid garbage bins to salvage anything at all to eat or sell.

There had already been a slow and steady strangulation of the Gazan economy and living standards since Israel occupied Gaza in 1967. Before then, Gaza’s rich and fertile land yielded