



Isfey School demolished by Israeli bulldozer. (Photo Credit: EAPPI)

Masafer Yatta Fact Sheet **3 August 2023**

Masafer Yatta is in the South Hebron Hills, and it spreads over 30,000 dunamsⁱ (3,000 hectares) within Area C of the West Bank. It includes 12 Palestinian villages: Halaweh, Isfey, Jinba, Khallet Althaba', Khirbet al Fakheit, Khirbet al Majaz, Khirbet Sarura, Khirbet al Tabban, Maghayir al Abeed, Mirkez, Tuba, and Umm Fagarah. Approximately 1,000 Palestinians reside in the area, including 500 children. The area has seven clinics and eight coeducational schools that accommodate 420 students: 50% boys, and 50% girls.ⁱⁱ

In the 1980s, Israel classified most of Masafer Yatta as a closed “firing zone” to be used for military training purposes, termed Firing Zone 918. Transcripts of a 1981 meeting show that Ariel Sharon, then Minister of Agriculture, requested that the Israeli military create military training zones in Masafer Yatta to displace the area’s Palestinian residents.ⁱⁱⁱ Israeli authorities are using coercive tactics, and have been putting extraordinary pressure on the Masafer Yatta residents to leave the area. These measures include limited access to electricity, water, food, education, freedom of movement, and medical services; on top of home demolitions.

The Israeli military regularly demolishes Palestinian structures in Masafer Yatta, and has issued demolition or stop work orders against most of the homes, animal shelters, water cisterns, and community infrastructure. The military justifies the demolitions on the grounds that the structures were built without construction permits—while at the same time the permits are impossible to obtain. Permits are not granted in military Firing Zones, and any construction or development in these Palestinian communities is considered illegal under Israeli military law. Six of the area’s seven clinics, and seven of the eight schools have demolition orders.^{iv} On 1 May 2019, Israel reduced the demolition notice time in the West Bank to 96 hours, which means that the residents do not have enough time for a court appeal against the demolition notice.

In 1999, Israeli forces expelled 700 residents of Masafer Yatta^v on the grounds that they were living there “illegally” and had not been permanent residents. A few months after the expulsion, they were permitted to return “temporarily” after an interim injunction from an Israeli court, and due to the residents’ struggle for the right to remain on their land.

To remain in their homes, Masafer Yatta Palestinians are using nonviolent resistance, advocacy through international humanitarian organizations, and legal means in Israeli courts. They are not deterred by the military closures, checkpoints, home demolitions, denial of basic human services, and restrictions on freedom of movement. Masafer Yatta Palestinians remain resilient also in the face of settlers who attack the people on a daily basis.

According to the Israeli human rights organisation B’tselem, Israel has offered Masafer Yatta residents “alternative locations.” B’tselem describes the offer as “meaningless,” because it amounts to “a violent threat that leaves the residents with no choice.”^{vi}

Communities also face violence from settlers who block roads, attack shepherds, and set haystacks and grazing areas on fire, undermining the Palestinians’ physical security, lowering their standard of living, and increasing their dependence on humanitarian aid.^{vii} There are nine settlements in the area: Beit Yair, Susiya, Maon, Karmael, and Avigayil; and four smaller outposts of Mitzpe Yair, Nof Neshet, Havat Maon, and Havat Yair.

On 4 May 2022 Israel’s High Court of Justice rejected the petition asking that Firing Zone 918 be cancelled entirely and that the evictions be stopped. The ruling made the unacceptable assertion that “when an explicit provision of Israeli law is at odds with the rules of international law, Israeli law takes precedence.”^{viii}

The intensification of military training exercises in Masafer Yatta following the court ruling has added to the hostile environment endured by Palestinians. The Israeli military carries out training in and around the villages and uses live ammunition and tanks. Soldiers are routinely stationed at the entrances and exits of villages as well as between them. Israeli military pressure on the residents of Masafer Yatta to leave the area violates Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, whereby the forcible transfer of an occupied population is prohibited.

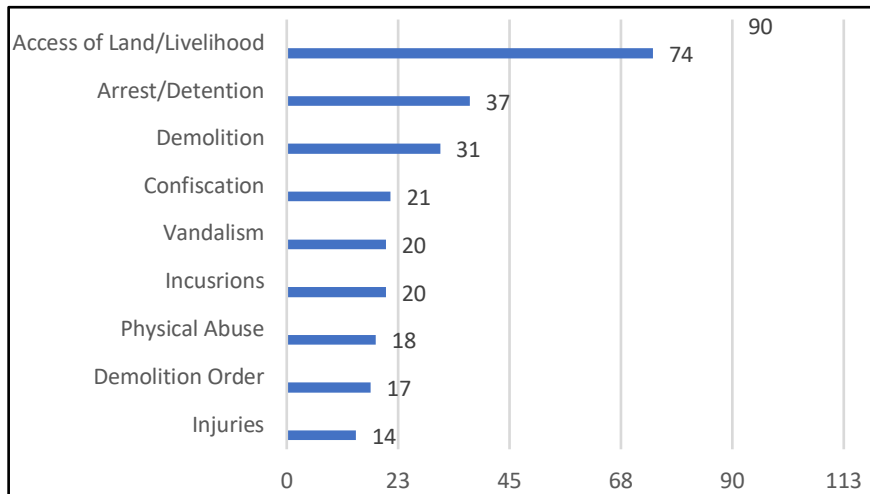
Demolitions and Displacement in Masafer Yatta^{ix}

During the last five years, between 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2022, Israel demolished 129 structures in Masafer Yatta, of which 87 were donor funded. That amounted to 67% of the demolitions. Three hundred six persons were displaced due to the demolitions, of whom 127 were children, which amounted to 42% of the displacement.

EAPPI Documentation of Human Rights Violations in Masafer Yatta

During the pre-COVID year in 2019, the Ecumenical Accompaniers documented 173 incidents of human rights violations. During 2022, the number increased to 391 incidents. The number of incidents increased by 126% from 2019 to 2022.

The following chart shows the 10 highest types of human rights violations in 2022 in descending order:



EAPPI Documentation of Harassment of Palestinians in Masafer Yatta

- The village of Tuba was raided in the early hours on 3 July 2023. Israeli security forces arrived at approximately 1:30 AM, turned their flood lights towards people’s homes, made lots of noise, and frightened the shepherd dogs that started barking and adding to the frantic situation in the community.

- Israeli soldiers and security officers entered the village of Khallet Athaba’ on the 7 June 2023. They went to the home of a local resident; took away the electricity generator, and handed a paper to the owner asking him to pay a fine within 30 days if he wanted the generator back. During the incident, a soldier threw a sound bomb in the community.

- No less than six soldiers arrived in Khirbet al Fakheit. They woke up the community at 1:00 AM, on the 13 January 2023. They entered the houses, took pictures; and asked people for their names, identity cards, and telephone numbers. One Palestinian man said that soldiers, wearing face masks, entered his home with their guns pointed at the family, and that the soldiers spent 30 minutes there. He added that such raids in the community occurred frequently.

ⁱ The 12 villages of Masafer Yatta (Firing Zone 918) in the South Hebron Hills, Breaking the Silence. 15 October 2020

[Firing-Zone-918-Oct-15.pdf \(breakingthesilence.org.il\)](https://breakingthesilence.org.il/Firing-Zone-918-Oct-15.pdf)

ⁱⁱ Nidal Younis, Head of Masafer Yatta village council. Information obtained by phone on 20 June 2023).

ⁱⁱⁱ Document exposed by Akevot: Ariel Sharon instructed IDF to create training zone to displace Palestinians, Akevot. 9 August 2020

[Document exposed by Akevot: Ariel Sharon instructed IDF to create training zone to displace Palestinians | Akevot](#)

^{iv} Same as referenced number 2.

^v Fact Sheet: Masafer Yatta communities at risk of forcible transfer, UN OCHA. June 2022
[Fact sheet: Masafer Yatta communities at risk of forcible transfer | June 2022 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory \(ochaopt.org\)](#)

^{vi} Fast-Tracked war crime: Israel informs Palestinians from Masafer Yatta of eminent expulsion, B'Tselem. 2 January 2023
https://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20230102_fast_tracked_war_crime_israel_informs_palestinians_from_masafer_yatta_of_imminent_expulsion

^{vii} Same as reference number 5

^{viii} The Association of Civil Rights in Israel. Synopsis of Judgement HCJ 413/13 and HCJ 1039/13. Abu 'Aram v. Minister of Defense
https://01368b10-57e4-4138-acc3-01373134d221.usrfiles.com/ugd/01368b_aa100a9da4dd44adaa254f5475c77d75.pdf

^{ix} UN OCHA breakdown of data on demolition and displacement in West Bank
<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieMmJkZGRhYWQtdk0MS00MWJkLWI2NTktMDg1NGJlMGNiY2Y3liwidCI6IjBmOWUzNWRiLTU0NGYtNGY2MC1iZGNjLTViYTQxNmU2ZGM3MCIslmMiOjh9>