80+ INGOs Urge Israel to Halt the Demolition and Forcible Transfer of the Bedouin Community of Khan al Ahmar

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Concerned about a recent ruling by Israel’s High Court of Justice authorizing the demolition of the Palestinian Bedouin village of Khan al Ahmar and evacuation of its residents to a site near Abu Dis, AIDA, a network consisting of more than 80 INGOs operating in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), calls on Israel to halt its plans to forcibly relocate this vulnerable community and to allow them to live in peace and dignity in their current location. AIDA also urges the international community to resort to appropriate measures to bring Israel into compliance with its international obligations.

The Palestinian Bedouin community of Khan Al Ahmar is comprised of 181 people, who originated from Tel Arad in the Negev and were displaced to the West Bank in 1951. The vast majority are Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA. The community has resided in its present location near Jerusalem since 2009. Khan al Ahmar is located in Area C of the West Bank - under full Israeli civil and security control under the Oslo Accords - close to the Kfar Admumim settlement, a closed military zone and the foreseen extension of the West Bank Barrier.

Khan al Ahmar Abu Helu is one of 18 Bedouin communities belonging to the Jahalin tribe who are at risk of forcible transfer in the Jerusalem periphery because of their location in an area earmarked by Israel for the future expansion of the Ma’ale Adumim settlement block under the so-called ‘E1 Plan’.

Daniela Bernacchi, CEO & General Manager at Cesvi said: “The execution of Israel’s plan to connect Maale Adumim with Jerusalem would cut the West Bank in two, and further limit Palestinians’ freedom of movement and isolate communities”.

The community has been subjected to an increasingly coercive environment over the past couple of decades to force them to leave their homes and lands and accept their relocation. Beyond the absolute prohibition on forcible transfer prescribed by international law, Jabal West, the relocation site prepared by Israel near the Palestinian town of Abu Dis, raises humanitarian concerns, as it is located in an urban area, near a refuse dump site, and is therefore not appropriate to host a Bedouin community whose traditional lifestyle relies on herding and grazing.

The Israeli High Court of Justice’s ruling puts an end to a protracted legal battle that sought to protect Khan al Ahmar residents from forcible transfer. The community categorically rejects Israel’s relocation plan, and insists on their right of return to their ancestral lands in Southern Israel as the only durable solution to their plight. In the meantime, they have appealed to the international community for protection and assistance to remain in their current place of residence.

Furthermore, should Khan al Ahmar’s forcible transfer be allowed to materialize, it will serve as a negative precedent that could trigger the expedition of the forcible transfer of dozens of communities at risk across the West Bank.
“The relocation of Khan Al Ahmar would create a worrying precedent for other communities at risk of forcible transfer, besides paving the way for Israeli annexation of Palestinian land”, says Rossella Urru, Head of Mission at Première Urgence Internationale.

The majority of the structures at risk of demolition were provided as humanitarian assistance by the international community. These include a primary school, made of mud and tires, which serves 170 children from Khan al Ahmar and neighbouring Bedouin communities. The demolition of the school would constitute an attack on the right to education, which all states have an obligation to protect.

If carried out, the forcible transfer Khan al Ahmar would represent a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and, as such, constitute a war crime under the Rome Statute.

Therefore, AIDA urges the international community, including the EU and its Member States, the United States of America, and other international actors to:

- Publicly condemn the ruling of the High Court of Justice in the case of Khan al Ahmar, which violates international law;
- Take concrete and immediate steps to prevent the demolition and relocation of Khan al Ahmar and bring Israel into compliance with international law;
- Engage directly with the Government of Israel, reiterating that the wanton destruction of Palestinian property and obstruction of humanitarian assistance violate International Humanitarian Law; and that the forcible transfer of the Khan al Ahmar community and other communities at risk would constitute a war crime;
- Demand that the Government of Israel should immediately cease its plans to relocate Khan al Ahmar and other Palestinian communities in the West Bank and allow to remain and develop in their current locations;
- Systematically protest against demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian property, and demand restitution or compensation from the Government of Israel for confiscated or demolished international assistance in oPt.

The Association for International Development Agencies (AIDA) is a coalition consisting of more than 80 international organizations working in the occupied Palestinian territory. For more info about AIDA, see: www.aidajerusalem.org