

Wadi Foquin: was threatened, in danger, may be counting its last days

Wadi Fukin is a Palestinian village in the Bethlehem governorate which was traditionally a farming community. After being destroyed and rebuilt and losing 70-80% of its land, the village had managed to preserve its beauty and culture for decades. Its inhabitants were hoping that the ever growing settlements in its vicinity and the announced route of the separation wall would spare it somehow and would not come much closer than what was already constructed.

That hope was crushed last summer. People only had a few days to recover from the horrible events in Gaza and the unrest in the West Bank, when the army descended into this small village of approximately 1300 inhabitants to place **signs to announce the confiscation of up to half of its remaining land.**

The announcement triggered the first ever protests in this small village. **These protests were immediately met with violence against the unarmed protesters** consisting of men, women, elderly and children. The random firing of massive amounts of tear gas also affected the livestock in the stables.

People know of plans to build the wall in the valley and to build a **new industrial site** on the West Bank side of the village similar to other such zones it would attract cheap Palestinian labourers who would have very limited protection by law and none in practice because of the site's location. Environmental regulation is also less strict than inside Israel **further threatening the fragile ecosystems** in this green area.

Even now waste water from Betar Illit regularly flows downhill onto the agricultural fields of Wadi Fukin. Over the past few years **more and more armed settlers**, are coming down to the village to sit in the fields, swim in the private irrigation pools often hostile to anybody requesting them to get out of the private property they occupy during their 'visits'.

Knowing that uncultivated lands are at risk, over the years trees were planted, terraces were built and an agricultural road was widened to allow access for tractors but time and again **trees were uprooted, terraces were destroyed and the road was closed by military order. Even the only playground in the village is threatened with demolition.**

In January 2015 the villagers started hearing rumours of even more expansion on lands confiscated in 1982. **The expansion as portrayed on the pictures and plans show that the settlement would expand onto the main road entering the village.**

If construction starts, which could be this summer already, the future of the village looks very bleak indeed and recovery will be impossible, the very existence of the village and its way of living will be threatened. When people will have no choice but to leave the village an important area of water resources, land and agricultural products will be lost to **the Bethlehem area further limiting its economic viability** where revenues from tourism are mere peanuts to what they used to be.

- **Collective punishment:** The Israeli cabinet stated that the decision was in response to the kidnapping and killing of three settler youths, thereby openly revealing its intent to use collective punishment against the thousands of inhabitants of these five Palestinian

communities for a crime they did not commit. This constitutes a flagrant violation of international law.

- **Illegal transfer of a foreign population:** the Israeli government has stated that the 2014 confiscation of land will serve to enlarge the existing settlement of Betar Illit but also to establish a new city where the now illegal outpost of Gva'ot is located.
- **Discrimination:** When taking a good look at the map it clearly shows that land that is taken away for the sole benefit of the establishment of yet more illegal Israelis only settlements. Absolutely no space is left for the natural growth of the Palestinian community. Blatantly showing that the wellbeing of Palestinian families is never being taken into account.
- **Oppression:** When people go out to protest in a non-violent way without posing any threat even to the illegal occupants of their land they are faced with disproportionate violence from the Israeli occupation forces and because they reside in Area B they have no one to turn to for protection.
- Destroying chances for a just and long-lasting peace by creating **facts on the ground:** Israeli politicians and officials do not miss an opportunity to **unilaterally declare** that the area which they refer to as Gush Etzion, yet which in reality constitutes part of the Bethlehem governorate; will inevitably become part of Israel proper in any future peace deal.

The villagers are aware that they have very little chance to win in a confrontation in court since **the Israeli laws and rules have proven, time and time again, that they were designed to legalise the expropriation of land for the sole benefit of a settler population.** Coated in legal terms, the Israeli statement attempts to camouflage the blatant illegality of Israel's decision under international law.

Appealing to international courts would take a lot of time by which time they perhaps could win the case but would lose their land and village. But again they have few places to turn to since Israel didn't ratify most of the existing international agreements.

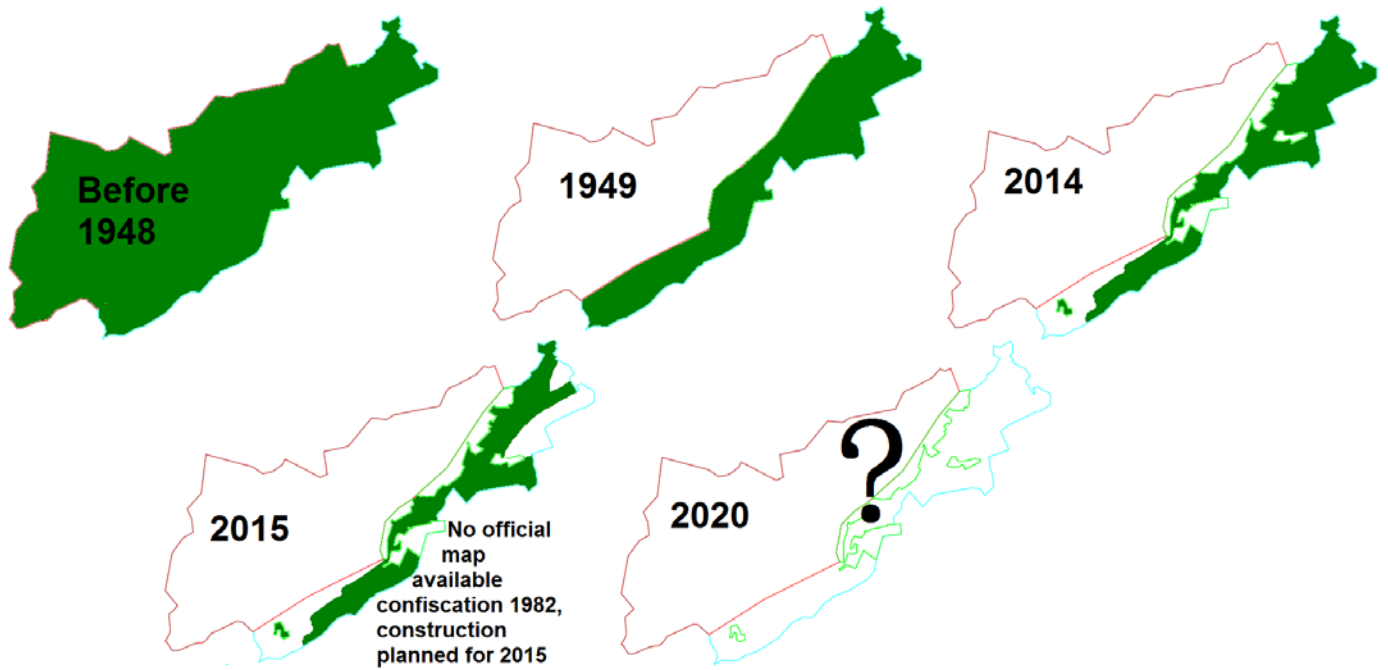
The international community ought to take up the fate of this village together with that of its neighbouring villages as a cause to demonstrate it is serious about confronting Israel's continued settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian Territory. To set as an example to show that the international community will not allow Israel to unilaterally dictate the terms of a peace agreement.

While welcoming statements of support, we urge you to introduce practical measures that will demonstrate the international community's seriousness in opposing Israel's recent decisions to expand settlements throughout the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem.

Each country should take concrete and effective measures to meet its legal obligations and use all the measures it has at its disposal, including sanctions, to change Israel's policy of regularly violating international law.

We urge the international community to:

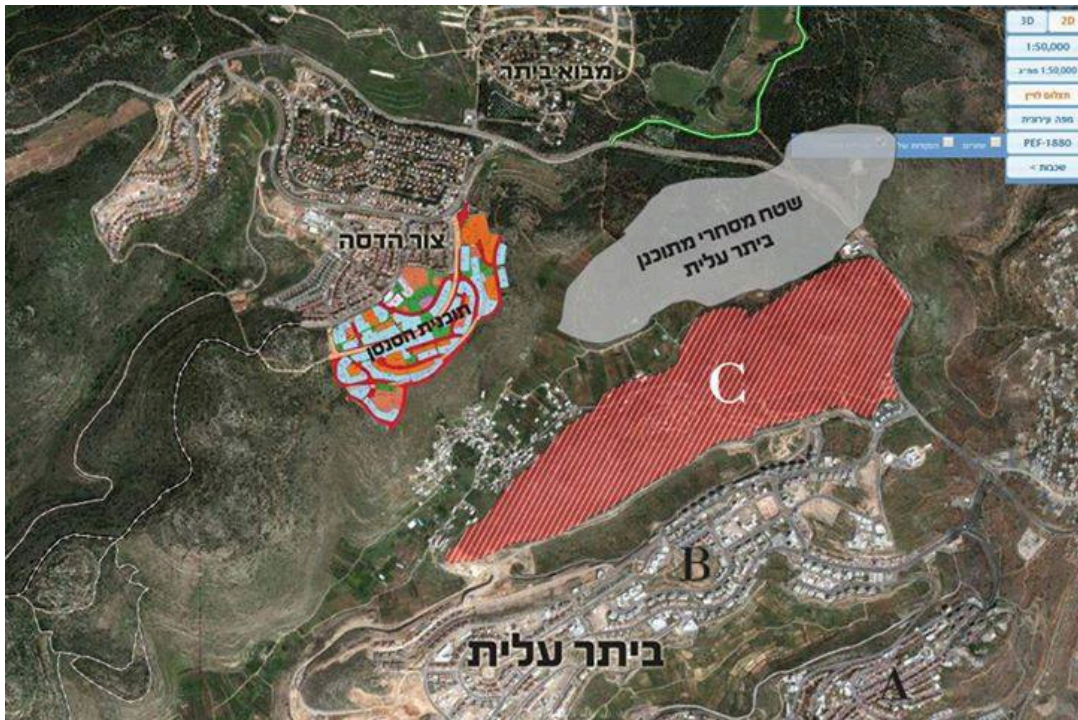
- ban all trade with illegal Israeli settlements because of the harm they cause for ordinary citizens throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.
- ensure that foreign companies stop participating in any Israeli project in the OPT,
- impose a weapons embargo on Israel at least until these decisions are completely reversed.



2 figure to illustrate approximately the loss of land for the village of Wadi Foquin from 1947 till 2015



1 protest posters saying: “no Horizon in 2020 for Wadi Fukin, No Horizon 2020 for Israel” (referring to the planned construction and confiscation on all sides of the village and the participation of Israel in the EU’s Horizon 2020 program, “mathematics



3. Pictures illustrating the planned and current construction around the village of Wadi Fukin.

Top map of planned work

Middle: settlement of Betar Illit depicted as "B" on the first map

Bottom: extension of Zur Hadassa currently inside Israel, where construction is very close to the Palestinian houses that have been damaged by the explosions for the expansion of Zur Hadassa

