

Israel Demolishes Newly Built Houses of Palestinian Families on New Year's Day

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Israeli forces demolished two houses On Wednesday belonging to Palestinian families in the Silwan neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem, south of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

After two years of construction, the al-Khalialeh families had made ready their houses to move into in the near future, their relative Jamal al-Khalialeh told Middle East Eye.

The two families were shocked to wake up on the first day of the new year to hear that Israeli bulldozers accompanied by military forces were demolishing the two houses.

They were not at the scene when Israeli security forces had earlier broken into the two properties, local media reported.

"They had an Israeli court hearing at 10am to look into the issue of demolishing the houses, but at 8:30 am they were surprised to hear the demolishing vehicles had come to knock down their houses," said Jamal.

The two houses are 100 metres square and located next to each other.

The first house is owned by Wafa al-Khalialeh with her husband and their seven children. The second house belonged to Mohanad al-Khalialeh and his wife and their two children.

Both families declined to comment for MEE, as they were still in a state of shock.

Jamal said that the families' lawyer had managed to get a halt decision from an Israeli judge at around 9:15am but that the Israeli authorities had refused to stop the demolition.

"They started demolishing at around 9am and said that they cannot leave the house half demolished as it is unsafe for the public," Jamal said.

'Nearly impossible to obtain building permits'

The demolition of the houses was carried out based on the basis that "building without permit" had occurred.

Israel rarely issues building permits for Palestinians in East Jerusalem or in Areas B and C of the occupied West Bank.

Since Jewish settlements are allowed to grow in the same area, many Palestinians consider the policy an effort to "Judaize" the areas by preventing Palestinian construction.

The Palestinian neighbourhood of Silwan is a hotbed of Israeli settler activity, often promoted by the right-wing Elad settler group.

Ali Jaabis, an activist in Silwan, told MEE that despite supporting their building application with documents from regulated lawyers, and the architecture meeting the proscribed conditions, "it is nearly impossible for Palestinians of Jerusalem to obtain building permits" from the Israeli authorities.

Israel's military occupied East Jerusalem in 1967 and later annexed it in a move never recognised internationally.

The government has named Jerusalem Israel's "eternal, undivided capital", but Palestinians consider its eastern sector the capital of any future state.

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Featured image: A sign stating 'Danger, demolition. Entry is prohibited' was placed by Israeli authorities on top of the rubble of the Khalialehs' houses (MEE\Sondus Ewies)

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