

Israeli Bulldozers Destroy Palestinian Children's Playground near Bethlehem

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Israeli bulldozers today destroyed a garden and children's playground in Beit Jala, and 100 fruit and olive trees in Al Walaja, both in the Bethlehem district, to make way for the continued construction of their illegal apartheid wall. Soldiers present used violent force to remove Palestinian, Israeli and international activists who attempted to prevent the destruction. Two Israelis were arrested immediately, and six internationals were later arrested.

In Beit Jala, this is the second time that this particular garden and playground has been bulldozed. A legal injunction preventing further destruction expired this week. Following the previous demolition, in early March, local Palestinian residents and international supporters rebuilt the playground and planted new olive trees in the garden. All these were today destroyed.

Twelve people, representing six different nationalities, sat in front of the Caterpillar bulldozer as it moved up to the garden. Soldiers forcefully removed all twelve, several of whom sustained minor injuries, and one of whom was hospitalised with suspected broken ribs after his stomach was repeatedly stamped upon by one of the soldiers.

After soldiers forced everyone but the owners of the garden up to the road above, they joined approximately 50 other internationals and local residents to hold a demonstration which lasted into the evening. Overlooking the wreckage of the morning's destruction, the protesters chanted and sang, asking only to be allowed back down to the house, where bulldozing had finished, to speak with the family there. Late in the afternoon, six activists, from the USA, Italy, Spain, Germany and France, managed to access the house via a back route, bringing food in to the family, before being arrested by Israeli Border Police, accused of illegally entering a Closed Military Zone.

In Al Walaja, Israeli military prevented any internationals or journalists from accessing the area to observe the uprooting of approximately 40 olive trees.

The International Court of Justice has ruled that the building of Israel's apartheid wall is in violation of international law. When complete, the wall will run for over 700km, the vast majority of it passing through and effectively annexing Palestinian land in the West Bank.

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