

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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CHIEF PALESTINIAN NEGOTIATOR DR. SAEB EREKAT SAYS IT IS “HIGH TIME” FOR INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO ACT BY PREVENTING HOME DEMOLITIONS AND SETTLEMENT EXPANSION NEAR JERUSALEM

Today, Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erekat called upon the “Quartet and the international community to intervene and prevent...demolitions [south of Jerusalem], which threaten the cause of peace.”

Last Tuesday, the Israeli Military delivered final demolition notices to residents of Um Rukba South, a neighborhood of al-Khader in the Bethlehem District near Jerusalem. (*A press advisory and map are available at www.nad-plo.org, under “news and updates.”*) Ten structures are under imminent threat of demolition, including 6 homes in which 58 Palestinians live.

Minister Erekat asserted that “these demolitions are part of a broader Israeli campaign to isolate Palestinian East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied West Bank, annexing Palestinian land, our holy places, and decimating our economy.”

He cited Prime Minister Sharon’s statements yesterday that Israel would go ahead with the E-1 Plan to territorially link Ma’ale Adumim and its 30,000 settlers with Jerusalem as additional evidence of the “broader Israeli campaign...to steal East Jerusalem from Palestine.” [E-1 is an area in the Adumim bloc, east of Jerusalem; the Israeli Government recently announced plans to build 3,500 housing units in the area, which would effectively seal off Jerusalem from the West Bank.]

All of the structures straddle an Israeli-only settler road that provides Israeli-only direct access to Jerusalem for the settlement of Efrat—of the Etzion bloc—and two Israeli outposts, Giv’at HaTamar and Giv’at HaDagan, which have been encroaching on Um Rukba’s land.

The newly-approved Wall route was supposed to dip 5 kilometers into the Israeli-occupied West Bank to incorporate Efrat and its outposts, but nevertheless would have left Um Rukba South on the “Palestinian” side of the Wall. The impending demolitions, which will cover roughly 80% of the neighborhood’s total area, might indicate a possible rerouting of the Wall.

Residents were given three days to appeal the final demolition notifications. After losing an appeal to the Civil Administration Planning Authority on Sunday, the concerned residents and their attorney appealed to the Israeli Supreme Court. Today, they were still

awaiting word from the Court on whether they would receive a stay of execution on the demolition orders.

Dr. Erekat stressed that East Jerusalem “is the economic engine and cultural center of Palestine,” noting that Metropolitan Jerusalem accounts for roughly one-third of the economic activity of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. “Taking Jerusalem off the negotiating table,” said Erekat, “would deal a death blow to the two-state solution. And Israel is factually doing just that. It is high time for the international community to act, and to show its commitment to the cause of a viable peace.”

He suggested that the international community could demonstrate its “commitment to the two-state solution and international law by ensuring that Israel refrains from demolishing the structures in Um Rukba [South] and that Israel enacts a complete, immediate and permanent settlement freeze, particularly in and around East Jerusalem.”

“Evolving facts on the ground are imminently pushing us to the point of no return,” he said.