

## Destruction of Olive Groves

### 1.2 Million Palestinian Olive Trees Uprooted in Palestinian Occupied Territories

- Israeli Occupation forces use arbitrary “decrees” to grab more land
- 1.2 million Palestinian olive trees have been destroyed by Israeli occupation activities
- Palestinian farmers are denied access to their olive groves
- Israeli occupying forces assert that “security” is the reason for olive tree destruction
- Palestinians assert “economic strangulation and land confiscation” are the reasons for olive tree destruction
- Israel’s occupation policies are in violation of international law

#### Israeli occupation forces use arbitrary “decrees” to grab more land

On Sunday, February. 15, 2009, the last day of a planting project sponsored by the Palestinian YMCA/YWCA, the Keep Hope Alive group of Presbyterians and Quakers from San Francisco joined with other internationals to plant olive trees on the land of a Palestinian farmer, Abu Firas, near the West Bank village of Jab’a just southwest of Bethlehem, some five miles from the Green Line.



Israeli administrative officials were waiting for the group when they arrived at the farm. They told the farmer he could not plant on his own land without a permit from the civil administration. The farmer replied that he knew of no such regulation, that the land had belonged to his family for generations, and that he needed no one’s permission to plant on it. The officials threatened to uproot the trees and left. The peacemakers proceeded to plant over 100 olive trees on Abu Firas’ land before Israeli military arrived with an ad hoc cut-and-paste photocopied order issued *that morning* after the planting had begun. The order declared south Jab’a, including the land they were planting, to be a closed military zone until 10 a.m. the following morning (when the internationals were scheduled to leave the West Bank). The soldiers ordered everyone to stop their planting and to vacate the land.

On Tuesday, February 17, Abu Firas found a second order that had been placed under a stone at the site of his newly planted olive trees. Written by the Israeli Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria also on Sunday, February 15, it instructed the farmer to remove the newly planted olive trees within 12 hours or be fined for not doing so. Abu Firas has ownership papers dating back to

the Ottoman Empire, but he was unable to present these papers to the office of the Civil Administration because it was closed until the following Sunday, February 22.

On Thursday morning, February 19, eyewitnesses observed military and police personnel removing all the newly-planted olive trees, placing them in a truck, and taking them away. When the international volunteers heard about this, they were outraged and confirmed in their opposition to the gross violations of international law which Palestinians face every day of their lives. B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied territories lists this as one of the methods Israel uses to confiscate Palestinian land. See: [www.btselem.org/English/Publications/Summaries/200205\\_Land\\_Grab.asp](http://www.btselem.org/English/Publications/Summaries/200205_Land_Grab.asp)

The olive tree is precious to Palestinians and has important economic, historical, and symbolic significance. Olive trees are a major commercial crop for Palestine, and many families depend on it for their livelihood. Products from the olive tree include, olives, olive oil, olive wood, and olive based soap. Approximately 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land in Palestine are planted with olive trees, compared to only 20 km<sup>2</sup> in Israel.<sup>3</sup> Olive oil is the second major export item in Palestine and olive production contributes to about 38.2% of the income from fruit trees production.<sup>1</sup>

One of the tragedies of the Israeli occupation of Palestine is the uprooting of historic olive trees to construct settlements, expand roads, build infrastructure, and “provide security.” The clearing of olive orchards and the uprooting of the trees has caused tremendous cultural, economic, and environmental losses for many Palestinian farmers.

### **1.2 million Palestinian olive trees have been destroyed by Israeli occupation activities**

- 1.2 million olive trees and thousands of acres of farmland have been destroyed in Palestinian territories by the Israeli occupation army since 1967.<sup>2</sup>
- Almost 465,000 olive trees were uprooted between 2000 and 2005, and this destructive practices continues daily in the Occupied Territories.<sup>2</sup>
- The Israeli military brings in bulldozers—sometimes armored and weaponized-- to uproot trees in the way of the "barrier wall's" route as well as land for a security strip adjacent to the wall. Palestinian olive trees are being replaced by settlements, roads, sewerage, electricity, running water and telecommunications networks, Israeli military barracks, training areas, and industrial estates and factories, all for the benefit of Israelis.<sup>3</sup>

### **Palestinian farmers are denied access their olive groves**

- Israel's occupation policies impose draconian restrictions on the movement of people and goods. Many Palestinian farmers cannot reach their agricultural lands to tend and harvest their crops.
- Farmers are forced to use alternative routes which must be negotiated on foot or by donkey because about 70 percent of these alternative routes -- those connected to main or bypass roads -- have been closed by the Israeli army with concrete blocks and ditches.
- The Barrier Wall will permanently separate Palestinian families from their farmlands, except for the gates that allow access at certain times, but more often than not, at the whim of Israeli soldiers who may not even turn up to open them. This makes year-round maintenance of farmers' crops extremely difficult if not impossible.

- Under an old law from the Ottoman era, Israel claims as state property land that has been "abandoned" and left uncultivated for a period of four years, and this land is then usually allocated to Israeli settlers.
- By making it almost impossible for some farmers to get to their land and demonstrate it is being cultivated, Israel can claim that Palestinian olive orchards have been "abandoned."<sup>3</sup>

### **Israeli occupying forces assert "security" is the reason for olive tree destruction**

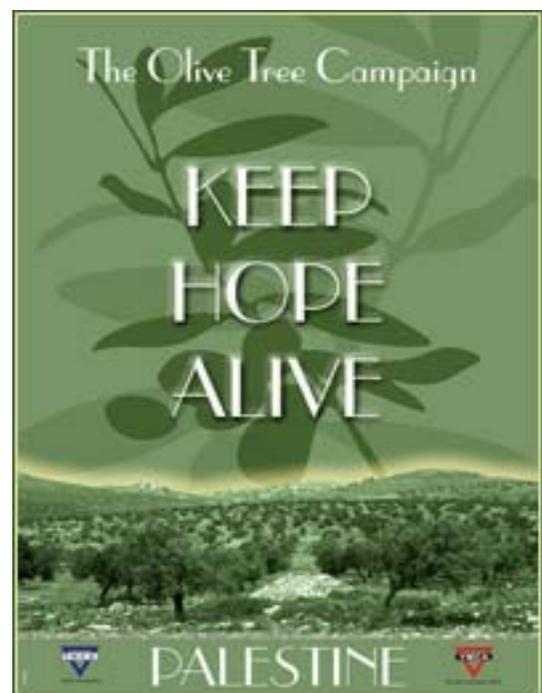
- "Security" is the excuse given by the Israeli army for the confiscation of Palestinian land and the uprooting of trees, mainly for the expansion of Israeli settlements, roads, and the building of the "separation wall."
- Olive groves along most of the road networks have been declared security zones, preventing farmers from tending their crops. Groves within 200 meters of the roads have been bulldozed in many areas to prevent their being used as potential cover by possible Palestinian stone throwers or gunmen.
- Israeli army commander Col. Eitan Abrahams stated in 2002 that "owners of groves are to blame when their trees are uprooted. If the owner of the grove, whom I assume knows the sniper or the petrol bomb throwers, does not take the measures he must take, then his grove will come down."<sup>3</sup>

### **Palestinians assert "economic strangulation and land confiscation" are the reasons for olive tree destruction**

- Many Palestinians believe that the Israeli government realizes the importance of the olive tree to the Palestinian economy, and it is therefore specifically targeting the olive trees. They believe that Israel has chosen to wage war against the Palestinian people not only in the battlefields but also in the olive fields.<sup>3</sup>
- Palestinians believe that Jewish settlers are using security concerns as a cover to plunder their olives and force them from the land.<sup>3</sup>

### **Israel's occupation policies are in violation of international law**

- According to the World Bank, the uprooting of olive trees violates the trade policies of the Paris protocols of 1954 which call for "free access for Palestinian goods to the Israeli market and vice versa." The uprooting and the closures are a clear violation of Article 23 of the Hague convention, which makes it clear that it is forbidden to destroy or seize the enemy's property "unless such destruction or seizure be imperatively demanded by the necessities of war."
- Land Leveling and property destruction violates the Fourth Geneva Convention. Article 33 prohibits collective punishment and states: "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited."



<sup>1</sup>Uprooting Olive Trees in Palestine, Atyaf Alwazir, November 2002,  
<http://www.american.edu/TED/ice/olive-tree.htm>

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.poica.org/editor/case\\_studies/view.php?recordID=903](http://www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/view.php?recordID=903)

<sup>3</sup>Sonja Karkar, The Weeping Olive Trees of Palestine,  
[/www.jerusalemmites.org/articles/english/2007/september/092.htm](http://www.jerusalemmites.org/articles/english/2007/september/092.htm)

### **Additional Resources**

[www.american.edu/TED/ice/olive-tree.htm](http://www.american.edu/TED/ice/olive-tree.htm)

[hazeltidings.blogspot.com/2008/07/disappeared-palestine-olive-tree.html](http://hazeltidings.blogspot.com/2008/07/disappeared-palestine-olive-tree.html)

“Olive Harvest Season in Palestine...” Applied Research Institute, Jerusalem, 18 September 2006

[www.poica.org/editor/case\)studies/view.php?recordID=903](http://www.poica.org/editor/case)studies/view.php?recordID=903)

Rami Sarafa, “Roots of Conflict: Felling Palestine’s Olive Trees” Harvard International Review,  
Vol. 26, 2004. [www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&se=gglsc&d=5005792274](http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&se=gglsc&d=5005792274)