

Living with the Demolition of Your Home

An Interview with Nureddin Amro

Nureddin and his brother Sharif are both blind. They live in the Wadi Joz area of East Jerusalem (occupied in 1967) together with their ill mother, their wives, the three young children of Nureddin, and the four children of Sharif who are all under the age of fourteen. In the early morning hours of March 31, soldiers arrived with aircraft and dogs. Having cut the phone and electricity lines, they surrounded the neighborhood and woke the family by pointing their guns through broken windows. The families were locked in one room and were not allowed to retrieve any of their belongings. Nureddin's request for permission to go to court to apply for a stay-of-demolition order was rejected; his brother was kicked so hard that later in the day he had to be taken to the hospital; most members of the



According to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, 450 structures were demolished and 514 people displaced in 2015. Since 1967, 48,488 structures have been demolished.

family, including the wives and children, were beaten. All the family's belongings were buried under the rubble. The kids' pets, rabbits, and chickens were killed during the demolition that destroyed four rooms, waterlines, electricity infrastructure, the sewage system, and Internet access.

According to Nureddin, the family had not been given prior notice of the intended demolition. They had been ordered to remove rubbish from the yard, which they had done. There was never any reason given as to why this demolition took place.

Nureddin was interviewed on January 14 in his partially demolished home by S., a volunteer from the International Solidarity Movement.

S.: What does security mean for you?

Nureddin: First of all, security means not being threatened or harassed by the [Israeli] authorities. This includes not being chased or arrested, not being stopped and searched at checkpoints and barriers on the streets, not being

confined by streets that have been blocked during clashes, and not being interrogated whenever you leave your home, among other things. Security means not having your home demolished. Second, security means having a stable income to provide for your family's needs. And third, security means having a problem-free family and social life.

S: What are the effects of a home demolition?

Nureddin: Once you learn that your home will be demolished, you lose stability and feel threatened. Your thoughts become distorted. You cannot focus or concentrate. You cannot be productive or develop your life. You cannot focus on the psychological aspects of life or of your family. My children have become more aggressive, violent, and depressed. They often fight and beat each other. In school, they cannot concentrate. Sometimes they even leave the classroom; they can't sit in class. I try to convince them to go to class, but they refuse to do so. One of my children wets the bed at night. They have sleep disorders. My wife, too, has a lot of anxiety and anger. She wants stability. She is also tired of cleaning. Since part of the house was demolished, this brings a lot of dirt into the rest of the house. A lot of the furniture was destroyed as well.



Where the bathtub stands used to be a small farm with animals, all killed in the demolition.

The emotional and financial strain of a house demolition can bring a family to the brink of ruin.

S: Has your job or salary been affected by the demolition?

Nureddin: My job has not been directly affected, but I had to pay a very high fee to have all the rubble cleaned out after the demolition. And I myself (!) had to pay for the bulldozer that demolished our house. Sometimes the Israeli authorities make people pay high monthly fees (for years) if their houses were built without a permit. And yet, in the end, the houses are demolished anyway. You can go to court, but you will lose the case. So people lose all the money they paid to cover the monthly fees. I know of many cases where house demolitions have caused couples to divorce. The dynamics in the family change when they are faced with the reality of home demolition. When people cannot solve these problems, the wife often goes back to live with her parents and then gets a divorce. Families are torn apart.

Once the house is demolished, there will still be a feeling of insecurity because you constantly think of the loss. You think about what you have lost in terms of family life. We lost a part of the house that had a certain function. This is now gone. So we try to find a new space to replace the demolished part; we try to create new strategies to keep life moving forward. For example, my kids used to play in the part of the house that was destroyed. Now they play in the entrance/living room area, which causes congestion and places much more stress on our daily life. We no longer have enough living space, let alone the possibility to welcome guests and relatives. The kitchen in the backyard, a sitting room, a playroom for the children, and a little farm with small animals, such as rabbits and hens, were all destroyed, in addition to the sewage system and electricity infrastructure, both of which are still damaged. The sewage now empties outside the house and produces a bad odor. It contaminates the trees and attracts a lot of mosquitoes. The children are still afraid that the authorities will come again sometime to demolish the rest of the house. And this is their goal: to make us feel insecure.

We share this experience, of course, with other people in our community to support each other.



House demolition.

There is also the sad story of my brother-in-law, who does not have a building permit for his house. So he must pay monthly fees. But when he ran out of money, Israel put him in jail. Depending on your salary, you can be required to pay fees of 1,000 or 2,000 or more shekels. First, he spent three months in jail, then he was released. Then he was put back in jail for another five months. He was released three days ago, so he is not ready yet for an interview. He is trying to rebuild his life, being reunited with his wife and children. He now has a debt of 10,000 shekels to the Israeli authorities, and if he doesn't pay, he will go back to jail. His wife is about to divorce him. She went back to her parents, but they convinced her to return to her husband.

This is how a house demolition is related to your income: If you don't pay your monthly fees regularly, the court issues an order to "employ" you

without a salary, which is basically slavery. This is known as *sherut avoda*, which means "work service" in Hebrew. Depending on the judge's decision, this could last three months, maybe five months, you never know. And the job hours are from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm, like a normal job. This does not allow you to get another part-time job where you can actually earn a salary, so you end up basically being a slave. This situation is well known in Jerusalem. Many Palestinians do this. So you must either go to jail, do *sherut avoda*, or pay. If you refuse to do *sherut avoda*, you will be jailed. The problem is that after years, your home will be demolished anyway. Maybe it will take seven, eight, or more years, but Israel will surely do it.

Nureddin Amro is director of the Siraj Al Quds School for blind and visually impaired children in Jerusalem. More on this demolition can be found at <http://www.imemc.org/article/71104>.

