

“I raise up my voice”

Testimonies of women living under occupation



حقل Haqel חקל

تضامن لحماية حقوق الإنسان
ברית להגנה על זכויות אדם
In Defense of Human Rights



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Haqel: In Defense of Human Rights represents hundreds of individual landowners and tens of villages in the South Hebron Hills, the Bethlehem region and the northern West Bank. The core of Haqel's strategic litigation work focuses on gaining land access to privately-owned Palestinian lands, protecting farmers from escalating settler attacks, demanding duty bearer accountability and protection of farmers, their families, their possessions and properties, tackling discriminatory planning policies in Area C and preventing the displacement of families and communities from their homes. Haqel runs a pilot program empowering women to engage in legal proceedings.

www.haqel.org.il

We would like to sincerely thank all 8 interviewees who took the time to share their personal stories.

The short background on each village in which the interviewees live, is based on Haqel's legal representation over the last two decades and information gathered from the villagers themselves.

Cover photo: Rital Herene, shepherding the family's herds in Umm El Amad, South Hebron Hills. Credit: Guy Butavia

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The title of the booklet is taken from a quotation by Malala Yousafzai: "I raise up my voice-not so I can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard".

In 2021, the majority of Haqel's funding came from foreign government entities.

Introduction

This booklet presents the personal testimonies of 8 Palestinian women, all of whom live in the area currently known as Area C in the West Bank. The words of these women were taken directly from interviews conducted by Haqel's staff and highlight their years of accumulated knowledge and life experiences living under the extreme circumstances presented by the occupation. The testimonies are deeply personal and focus on the challenges of women and their families as part of the local indigenous population living under occupation. These stories are a catalyst for empowerment, providing a channel for women from different communities and geographical locations to have their voices heard, thereby connecting them in their common struggle. The booklet provides the space for the freedom of expression, facilitating the processes of social transformation, and building family and community resilience. These women are agents of change – change and empowerment become possible when we see ourselves in others and others in ourselves as we begin to understand the power of a single voice.

In the occupied Palestinian territories, women don't only contend with poverty, the threat of home demolition and displacement and a lack of job opportunities, but deal with the moment-to-moment realities of life under military rule which stifles their ambitions, their families and households. In this booklet, the personal stories of these women, highlight the everyday trials and dampened aspirations of women and their families living under Israel's occupation regime. The women interviewed share their distinctive perspectives on land access, the threat of displacement, settler violence, the way in which they are treated by the Israeli security forces and how the Covid-19 crisis has impacted their lives. The testimonies reflect the everyday challenges of women in this extremely challenging reality.

As part of their traditional role in Palestinian society, women are responsible for taking care of their children, running their households and providing for their families. The impact of human rights violations on women is unique, affecting many aspects of their lives.

For example, the production of dairy products in the South Hebron Hills, where most of the interviewees live, is carried out exclusively by women and is critical for the income of the family. This role, learned and acquired over generations, requires a great deal of effort and patience. There are only a few women in the community who have this expertise, mentoring other women to perfect this skill. Women also support one another with child care, not only because of the bond between women, but because of the lack of services close to communities and the fact that men are often forced to work far from home.

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1. HCJ 393/82 Jamait Eskan Almalon v. Commander of IDF Forces

One of the most significant factors impacting the lives of women in the West Bank and Area C, which is under Israeli civilian and security control under the Oslo Accords, is the fact that there is almost no possibility for building legally, including essential infrastructure. According to international law, the State of Israel has a duty to ensure public order in the territory under its control, including its duty to regulate the lives of citizens in all aspects of life as required by modern society¹. The State of Israel, for example, is required to ensure that residents have a roof over their heads, that public buildings such as clinics and schools are located in residential areas, and that villages have sewage, water and electricity infrastructure. As a matter of policy, coupled with its aim to takeover Area C, the State of Israel does not approve construction plans in this area. It is almost impossible to obtain building permits, resulting in sparse construction and the constant threat of demolition of existing



structures. While the occupation affects both men and women, the way in which it affects and is experienced by women and men is different. Lacking privacy and adequate facilities, women are forced to contend with traditional boundaries, menstruation, and child bearing. Buildings which require personal private space are not available, and women in these communities suffer from the invasion of their personal privacy. Due to a lack of toilets, women postpone their needs when out in the fields for fear of exposure. Research has shown that women in the area suffer from urinary tract diseases because they avoid drinking water during the day.

Structures such as community clinics necessary for maintaining the health of women who need medical examination and follow-up are not available. Kifah, for example, refers to the lack of medical services in At Tuwani, and the lengthy struggle to obtain permission to establish an emergency clinic for women.

As a result of the lack of planning and basic infrastructure in Area C, communities are not connected to water networks. A lack of running water is extremely challenging in maintaining personal and household hygiene. Farseh talks about how she is forced to wash her dishes on the floor.

Frequent army incursions into Palestinian homes significantly impact women. Rawan refers to the stress during intrusions into her home, her need to maintain religious dignity, the violation of her personal physical space and the disruption of family life. She also recounts the invasive searches and examination of personal belongings when crossing the military checkpoint. Her young baby has to be taken out of his car seat so that the soldiers can search the seat for suspicious objects.

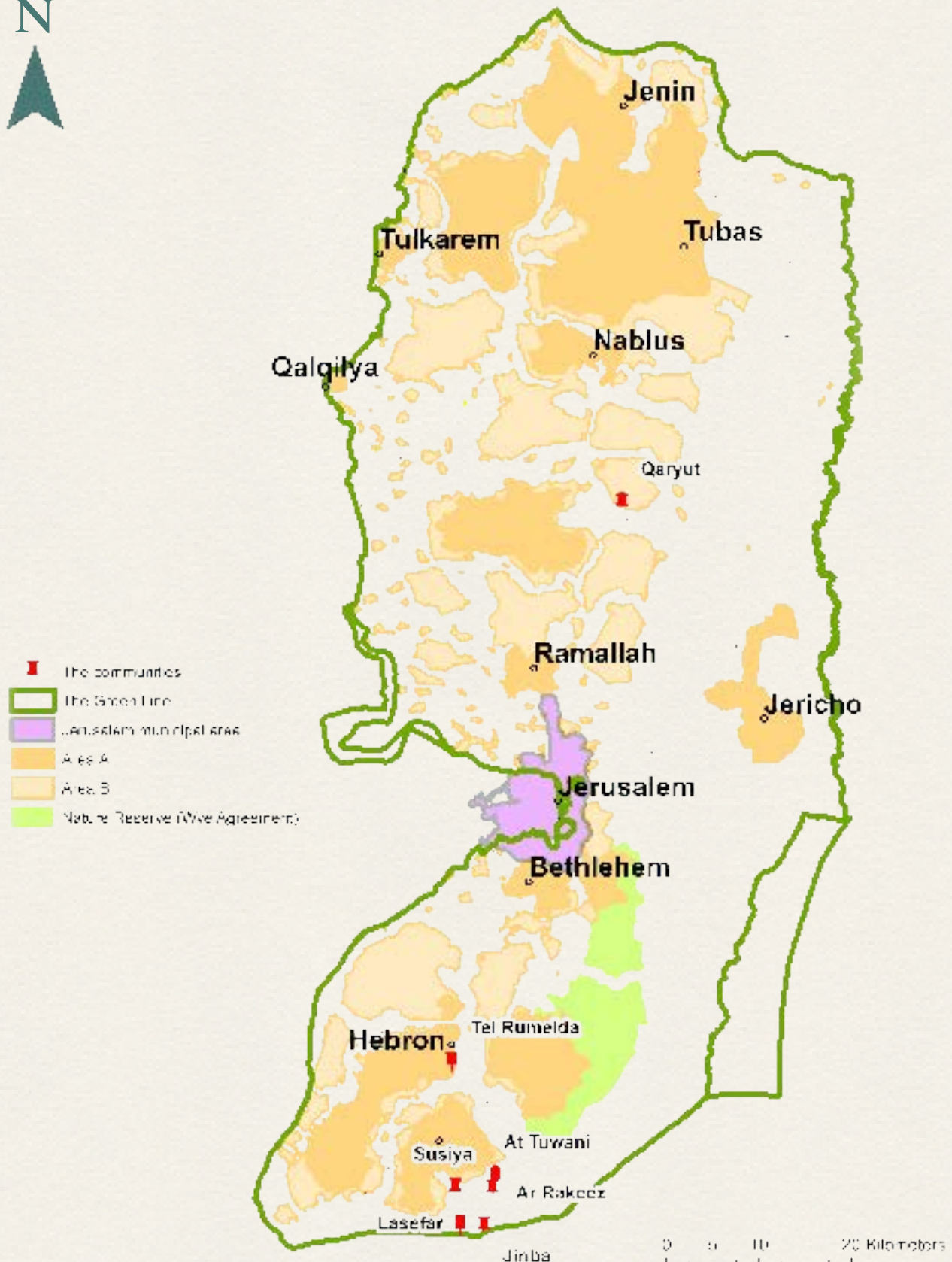


Rawan also talks about life in the seam zone, the enclaves trapped between the Green Line and the separation barrier. Landowners who own lands and live in this area are forced to apply for special permits to access and leave the area and are subjected to physical searches at the military checkpoint. Rawan describes the challenges for women in ensuring sufficient supplies for her family, the inability of family to visit and the difficulties in maintaining a normal life under this draconian permit system.

As evident in these testimonies, women live in constant fear of violence and attacks by settlers living in settlements and outposts established on the lands of the villages, declared by the State of Israel as state lands. Compared to men who can protect themselves to some extent, women and children are forced to remain in the confines of the village for fear of attack. Settlers engage in ongoing incursions into private Palestinian lands, plant saplings, engage in illegal construction, damage property and destroy aged trees essential for family income. Faizeh recalls how tens of trees which she planted and nurtured over decades were brutally destroyed by settlers. She describes the heartache and suffering she endured.

The testimonies reveal how the coronavirus impacted the lives of women, forcing them to remain isolated in their homes, struggling to provide for their households and limiting their social obligations to visit the sick and console families who lost loved ones as a result of the virus. Feryal describes the tragedy of losing her daughter to the virus.

Location of villages of interviewees in the West Bank





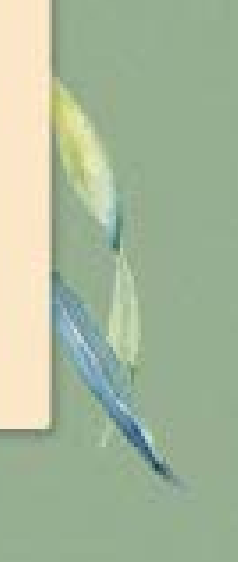
Kifah Mahmoud Mousa al-Adara (44)

From At Tuwani

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We, the women, milk the
goats in the morning,
then along with our
husbands and children,
take the cattle to pasture
and take care of the crops

”



My name is Kifah. I have four boys and two girls. When I came to this village, I was only 16 years old, and I have been living in this community for almost 28 years. I am originally from Yatta, but when I got married, in 1993, I moved here, where my husband's family lives.

The difference between living in Yatta and At Tuwani is that in my parent's house I had access to electricity, water, roads, schools, clinics, hospitals, and transportation. When I came here there was nothing. We could not build houses; the village only had seven houses built with stones, while the rest lived in caves. It was a completely different life, and I suffered so much at the beginning, since it was very difficult to adapt to life without electricity, water and a house. We only had one water well, and I used to carry six buckets of water, each day, on my head while walking half a kilometer in order to provide enough water for my household. However, I love this area, I love the community and its people. The lack of basic necessities and infrastructure does not deter

me, because I want to protect these lands and their people and I want to stay here.

It is important to mention that in Yatta (in Area A - see village map), I did not have to face settlers everyday. However, here, settlements are all around us, we face checkpoints and barricades all the time, and we have to travel via indirect routes. It really is not easy to reach one's own land, since the military chases us out all the time, and it is strenuous to shepherd one's sheep with the presence of the Israeli military. I did not have to face all these struggles when I lived in Yatta, I definitely did not get attacked by settlers there, but here it is a regular thing to be chased off by them, to get attacked by the military, and to get arrested.

Usually, we, the women, milk the goats in the morning, then along with our husbands and children, take the cattle to pasture and take care of the crops. Unfortunately, more often than expected, settlers from a settlement called Havat Ma'on, chase us and attack the

Kifah Mahmoud Mousa al-Adara | At Tuwani

cattle, they even shoot at the goats. In the spring of 2005, they poisoned the cattle by poisoning the wheat. Many of our cattle died that day, including other animals such as birds and deer. There were activists from organizations in the village - they helped by taking samples of the poisoned wheat, and found a deadly poison. Every household was damaged economically, we lost cattle, and had to milk the goats then throw the milk away for a few days, which was a huge loss for us women, and for the community as a whole.

I am always worried about my husband and my children whenever they leave alone with the goats. I always wonder whether the settlers are going to attack them or harm them in any way. It is a very stressful reality. My husband, who is a non-violence activist, has been arrested 12 times, and my children got arrested as well. The fees we had to pay for his release vary from 1,500 NIS to 20,000 NIS. It does not stop here though. Military forces would

barge in at night to disturb our sleep. Not a day passes without an attack happening, whether by the Israeli military or settlers².

We deal with this by consulting with our lawyers. I am well acquainted with Adv. Quamar, who worked on the lands near the Kharouba, where settlers violently attacked villagers and their cattle, who also had to go to the hospital to get proper treatment. I am also very supportive of my husband and my children and I always tell the women here that we should also contribute in the fields; that we need to work there and help with pasturing instead of remaining at home.

In 1997, despite the fact that we are not allowed to build here, we, the women, planned to establish a school here. Our children had to walk unreasonably long distances to be able to pursue their education, which was unacceptable. Education is a basic right for everyone, but our children face danger everyday when they go to school, whether from settlers, the military, or

2. In 2014, a High Court petition was submitted by Adv. Quamar Mishirqi-Assad, Haqel's co-director, to gain access to farmlands and to prevent settler violence and attacks on the families of the village. The attacks against the villagers have become more frequent and severe in the last year.

wild animals. So, we set up a project committee, and decided to build a school. The president, Yassir Arafat also supported us financially. He apologized for not being able to help us legally. Nonetheless, we began with building three classrooms, but faced obstructions from the military when they started apprehending people and confiscating tools. Despite the fact that it got a demolition order, we managed to get a ruling for ten years not to demolish the school. It was hugely successful in convincing people to remain here.

During the second intifada, the economic situation worsened significantly. Settlers cut down trees, burnt crops, seized lands, and poisoned cattle. Since these violations have caused economic drawbacks, I thought of establishing an organization for women, to aid them financially, since many women were not allowed to go to the city for work. At the beginning we began with only seven women, who are uneducated but all good at handicraft, such as weaving

wool, embroidery, and weaving straw. This organization assists in marketing these products; it is the place where women can advertise their work and earn a small amount of money.

Since it was very challenging for women to leave the home, many children did not receive their right to get vaccinated. We established a clinic which is open twice a week.

All of the organization's activities are non-violent. I usually gather the women and recruit them to do activities with the project committee. The community is very helpful; we plan, then execute.

Through this organization, we would accompany the farmers and shepherds to protect them. We would also offer emotional and psychological support by providing therapy sessions.



Kifah Mahmoud Mousa al-Adara | At Tuwani

We are used to the occupation closing up roads, but during the Coronavirus pandemic everything shut down. It is an exceptionally hard period, during which the suffocation doubles. I tend to take my family to the lands in hopes of decreasing the emotional stress, since I could not visit my parents for three months. The aspect of having to get used to applying new things like sanitizers, closures, and fear of other people creates huge psychological stress.

The pandemic has affected our economy greatly. For instance, the organization used to prepare meals for foreigners, who would also buy some of the handmade crafts. Now, women have no income at all. The education system is also deteriorating, children in elementary school are facing great hardship receiving a proper education, since some of the women here are illiterate.

The health system barely functions; it is overloaded with Coronavirus patients and cannot treat other patients. When my husband got

infected, it was a period full of fear and worry. It was extremely hard to tell my daughter not to go near her father. I was worried for both of them, since my husband got awfully tired, and his condition was dreadful for 15 days.

It is important to mention that human rights violations have multiplied during the pandemic. Many internationals and human rights activists used to accompany us when we shepherd, protect us and document everything. Back then, the army and the settlers were noticeably careful when they attacked us. Now, the assaults have intensified, the demolitions spiraled, land violations and confiscations escalated, and military barricades have multiplied. They took advantage of the fact that there is no supervision in order to increase their aggression.

The Village of At Tuwani

The village of At Tuwani is located about 14 km east of the city of Hebron in an area currently known as Area C, under full Israeli control. The village is located on a hill east of the city of Yatta. The local council includes the neighboring villages of Ar Rakeez, Umm Fagarah, Sarura, and Khallet Athaba. The name At Tuwani is taken from the numerous fig trees in the area. It was an area of rest for travelers and included natural springs and wells. There is a mosque in the village. During the British mandate, the village of At Tuwani was declared an archaeological site. The village is surrounded by the settlement of Ma'on and the illegal outpost Havat Ma'on. The total population of the village is 450 people, of which 218 are females.

The economy in the village is based primarily on agriculture. In the last year a master plan was approved for the village after a lengthy planning process. At Tuwani has a clinic and a school serving the village and neighboring communities.

Part of the village lands are located in the 918 Firing Zone (see background on the village of Jinba). Since 2004, Israeli soldiers and international volunteers have been escorting school pupils from surrounding villages to the elementary school in At Tuwani, in order to protect them against violence perpetrated by settlers from the Havat Ma'on outpost.



Rawan Yousuf Hussain Abu Qubeita (28)

From Lasefar

“

I cannot comprehend
how they see my
newborn child or a
bleeding woman as a
threat to them

”



My name is Rawan. I am a mother of three boys and one little girl, whom I raise with my husband Othman Abu Qubaita. We live in Lasefar village, in the South Hebron Hills, which consists of around 18 families.

It is very hard to live in Lasefar, because we cannot build here. We have been issued demolition orders for multiple buildings. Building materials are confiscated and if a truck tries to deliver materials, the driver gets in trouble and his vehicle gets confiscated.

Lasefar is surrounded by settlements. We are surrounded from all sides, by a settlement, a checkpoint and a road built for the settlers. I cannot allow my children to leave the house to play, because I always fear that settlers will attack them. We live two meters away from the fence, separating us from the settlement.

Despite the fact that we live behind the fence, our lands extend beyond it, way up to the water tower. Because the lands

are fenced off, we can only access these lands through a gate. We are not allowed to use the road.

We were unable to access these lands at all, until our lawyer, Quamar, succeeded in winning back these lands. Whenever we go to water the trees, clean the lands, or tend our sheep, settlers from the Yaakov Talia outpost clash with us. They either bring their own cattle to our lands or cut down our trees. They have done this on multiple occasions, causing us great financial losses. Going to our own lands is dangerous. They throw stones at us and call the police and the military.

As a mother, I find it dangerous to live here, especially for me and my children. There is no comfort here, and the children's basic rights are not taken into consideration. My children have no where to play, as there are no parks or any kind of a playground. I envy those people who can go for an evening walk with their kids.

Whenever we cross the checkpoint, our children need to be awake during the whole process. This is due to the fact that all of us need to leave our vehicle and undergo a body search. When I gave birth to my newborn, around a month ago, we had to pass through the checkpoint. They made me leave the car with my newborn on a cold chilly day. I could not stay in the hospital since they do not have enough space. I was barely able to walk and my husband had to help me make it to the searching room.

They did not take into account my current condition nor the baby's, and they completely refused my request to remain in the car with my infant. We had to go through the electric X-ray machines that have been proven extremely dangerous for pregnant women and children. Even when I was pregnant I was forced to pass through that machine every time. My child, who is 48 days old now, has been sick ever since; I had to get a private doctor to have him checked four times. I also

caught a cold after that incident and I constantly suffer from back aches. I cannot comprehend how they see my newborn child or a bleeding woman as a threat to them. What could I possibly hide in his baby blanket? Drugs? Illegal products? Weapons?

Previously, children had to walk around 3 kilometers in order to go to school, during summer and winter. Recently, we managed to rent a bus which can take them to school and guarantee their safety. Nonetheless, in order to spite us, soldiers at the checkpoint would hold the bus up for one to two hours, and, as a result, the kids would miss two classes. This delay happens both on the way to and from school.

Something that makes me really sad about living here is that I cannot see my family. My mother, sisters and brothers cannot visit me here, unless they have a very convincing reason. For example, when I gave birth, my husband sent a request for permits for my family members to visit me, because

Rawan Yousuf Hussain Abu Qubeit | Lasefar

my labor was very difficult. The government did not agree to give them permits unless my husband provided a document that states my medical condition, explaining that I am ill and suffering. Eventually my family got a permit for a two-day visit.

The infrastructure here is very bad. The services are almost non-existent. We have no clinic. Ambulances cannot enter this area. If one has a medical emergency, you need to go through the checkpoint using your own vehicle. Only if your ID confirms you live here, can you access the area. The military closes the checkpoint on Jewish holidays. We cannot leave or enter the area at all. There are no pharmacies here. Whenever I can go to the city I buy the necessary feminine hygiene products in bulk, because I know if I run out, there is going to be a problem due to the fact that it is hard to go through the checkpoint. If I happen to run out, I ask my relatives if they can spare some. If that does not work then I must go to Yatta, the city, by myself and buy them

and I will need to go through the military checkpoint.

I even keep my laundry as close to my house as possible. I set up the ropes as far from the fence as I can, because I fear that the settlers may cut the rope, burn my laundry, or throw it to the ground and stamp on it with their dirty shoes. Either way, I am really scared of them, so I prefer not to have any contact with them at all because they are so full of hatred.

There is a cow farm near the village that belongs to settlers. It smells really bad, especially in the summer. The smell attracts insects and bugs, which enter our house. No matter how much I clean, and how many cleaning products I use, the smell and the flies do not leave my house. It bothers me when I cook, because I fear that the insects carry diseases and could harm my children. I cannot even open the windows because of the smell. We have to use electricity to cool off which is expensive and puts more financial pressure on us.

During the pandemic, we were stuck in the village for almost four months. We were not allowed to leave, unless it was for a medical emergency, which required a long process of security coordination, and a permit with a limited time frame. We couldn't even leave to buy gas for cooking. We had to seclude ourselves in our homes, which was very much like staying in prison, but we needed to protect ourselves. Only one person from each family was able to request a permit to leave. Those granted permits contacted each family to ask them if they needed anything.

Another issue that put a strain on me as a mother is the fact that schools closed and the children remained in the house. They had to learn online, meaning, I had to adapt myself to be a mother and a teacher, and assign a specific space for school in the house. I also had to divide my time to manage the household, take care of the children as well as teach them their school material.

During Ramadan, which is a special time for socializing and strengthening family ties, I could only visit my family a few times for a short while. I couldn't stay there for long because we had to get back before the iftar (fast-breaking meal) which starts at sunset. We had to go through the checkpoint to get back and if it was late the children would fall asleep. It was difficult to wake them up to get out of the car and be searched. I really miss spending time with my family and I wanted to be part of the family gatherings, but I needed to compromise for the health and safety of my children.

It was only a few days ago when I heard rapping on my door at six in the morning. After a couple of hours of sleep after the suhoor meal (pre-fast meal), I groggily opened the door and I found civil administration officials standing at my door. I slammed the door quickly since I was not dressed properly. My hair was not covered. I hurried to my room, got dressed and woke my husband up so he could deal with them. Apparently, they

Rawan Yousuf Hussain Abu Qubeit | Lasefar

came for their regular check up to mark who is actually living in the house and who is not. They treat us like students in elementary school taking attendance. Those who are not in their houses, they refuse to give them permits to live here later on.

Everyday, all day, I need to have my hair coverings accessible. I cannot practice my right of privacy as a Muslim woman. If I go to sleep, I need to have the hijab right next to me just in case they break in. Whenever they come to my house when my husband is absent, I shout for my neighbors to deal with them. This is due to the fact that I am a Muslim woman, and I cannot have men in my house while my husband is absent. Secondly, I do not know Hebrew, so there is no way I can communicate with them. Thirdly, to be frank, I am very afraid of them, and cannot face them on my own.

I wish I had the chance to work and support my husband, but there are no work opportunities here in Lasefar. Although I

know and witness how much he tirelessly works to provide for us, unfortunately, there is no way I can help him financially.

The Village of Lasefar

The village of Khirbet Lasefar is located in the South Hebron Hills, in an area currently defined as Area C, about 15 km south of the city of Yatta. The village is surrounded by the settlements of Metsudat Yehuda, Beit Yatir and the “Talia Farm” outpost. Caves in the village were dug before the period of the British Mandate. Today, there are about 18 families living in the village, all of whom belong to the extended Abu Qubeita family, which numbers about 77 people, of whom 21 are women.

Following a military order issued by the military commander in 2009, the village and its lands were trapped in the area between the Green Line and the separation barrier, otherwise known as the seam zone. As a result of this declaration and the refusal of the state to approve the application for “permanent residence in the seam zone”, a High Court petition was submitted on behalf of the Abu Qubeita family to gain special permits designating them as “permanent residents” so they could access their privately-owned agricultural lands. In response to the petition, the state issued permits to the residents and demanded they be maintained as a condition for living in the seam zone, cultivating their lands and grazing their flocks. Like in other locations in the seam zone, the army’s draconian permit regime prevents any Palestinian who does not hold a permanent resident's permit, who wishes to enter this area (for example for cultivation in the seam area, for employment or family visits) is prevented from doing so. This permit system imposes severe restrictions on the lives of the villagers, including preventing the



regular movement of people, vehicles, and goods necessary for the daily life of the residents, and severely impairs their ability to maintain continuous business, social and family ties with those living outside the seam area.

Together with the flocks, the villagers, who make a meager living, live in caves and huts with their wives and children on lands adjacent to their agricultural plots. The huts are not connected to water or electricity infrastructure. The villagers use solar panels and are forced to purchase water in tanks. Most of the homes have demolition orders as Israel has never initiated a plan for the village. All building permits requested have been denied.

In addition to these challenges, the residents of the village suffer from violent harassment perpetrated against them by settlers from the unauthorized "Talia Farm" outpost whose sole purpose is to take over these lands, using all possible means to displace the villagers. An additional petition was submitted in 2013 demanding action against ongoing settler violence and trespassing on the family's lands.



Hamdeh Hamed Hasan al-Haddar (62)

From Susiya

“

We face hellish circumstances
everyday here....The children
are living in a frightening
reality here. As long as settlers
live nearby, my children are
unable to live in security

”

My name is Hamdeh. I'm also known as Um Nimer. I live with my sons; Hamdan and Hamoudeh and their five children in a room, along with my son Suleiman. I have been living in the village of Susiya for about 30 years, after we were expelled from Khirbet Susiya. Back then, I had six sons and five daughters. We had to move every time we were displaced, until we were finally able to remain here in Wadi ar-Rakhim (Susiya).

We mainly live off our cattle, and whatever survives the Israeli's excursions in our land. We plant zucchini and tomatoes. The Israelis often send their cattle to graze on our cultivated land, which is one of the reasons for the lack of food in our household. They often bring dogs with them, which they let loose on us. To frighten us, the settlers order their dogs to bark at us when we are riding back home on donkeys.

Once, Israeli settlers barged into my house, went to the kitchen, destroyed our food and broke

the dishes. While they rampaged, the Israeli military was simply standing there, doing nothing. They did not talk to them or try to stop them. I tried to stop one of the soldiers who tore the flour sack and poured it all over the floor, but he stomped on my foot forcefully, and I had to go to the hospital as a result.

The children are living in a frightening reality here. As long as settlers live nearby, my children are unable to live in security. They are prone to get beaten, and their fragile bodies cannot handle it. They keep waking up during the night, screaming from fright due to all the psychological torture the settlers put them through. During the day, the children often come running to the house in terror, because some settler was chasing them. They hit our children, but no one can stand up to them.

One time, when the settlers invaded our lands, my late husband and I went there to expel them. The settler caught my husband and pummeled

him to the ground, and I could not defend him. I felt so powerless and I kept shouting for help. The settler was taking some sort of weapon out of his pocket, and all I could do was stand between them trying to fend him off. When the police and military forces arrived, the settler bashed me violently and I had to go to the hospital to receive medical treatment. I was hospitalized for two days because of how brutally he had beaten me.

When I got home, two settlers showed up to attack my cattle and assault me. I ran to the Israeli military forces seeking help, but I couldn't understand them because they do not speak Arabic. They brought an Arab soldier, I told him what happened and showed them the blood on my legs and my back. They seized them, and told me that I needed to accompany them to the settlement of Kiryat Arba' to submit a complaint. I couldn't go with them because I couldn't leave the children alone. I don't know what happened to them after this incident.

I cannot travel easily here. I do not feel safe to travel, even by car, because the Israeli authorities confiscate vehicles. They have confiscated five cars, one of them belonging to my son Ahmad, who had to pay 30,000 shekels to get it back. So, we travel on donkeys, which are not safe either. Whenever I need to go to the city of Yatta, I have to go through the military checkpoint, where they hold us up for hours.

Yesterday, for example, they delayed us at the checkpoint for a whole hour for no reason. They close the gate to prevent us from getting through. If we take indirect routes, it requires around two hours to reach the city. It is exceedingly difficult for someone in a medical emergency such as a woman who is about to give birth and needs proper prompt medical treatment. We face hellish circumstances everyday here.

Thankfully, ever since our lawyer, Quamar, helped us to manage the settlers, the situation has noticeably improved. Settlers

Hamdeh Hamed Hasan al-Haddar | Susiya

used to raid our lands on a daily basis, but now their assaults have decreased. They would swarm our land, carrying weapons, such as canes, guns, and sharp knives. When the military forces arrived, they came to protect the settlers. When settlers attacked us, the military would stand still watching us get attacked. Nowadays, thanks to the intervention of Quamar, we are able to access part of our lands, and shepherd our goats.

In 2001, soldiers barged into our house in the middle of the night. I remember it was raining. We had to move all our belongings outside while it was raining. That night, they issued demolition orders for the houses and the water well. I am extremely frightened of watching my house get demolished. I am afraid of becoming homeless, of my family becoming strays with no roof over our heads. Witnessing Israelis demolish houses here is grueling and terrifying.

In another incident, I returned home and couldn't find my

son. The cattle were missing. He shepherds the cattle. I immediately went to the military camp demanding to know where my son and the cattle had been taken. I heard the cattle bleat. The soldiers refused to tell me where my son was and said I should go look for him myself.

I found him, frightened and humiliated. He was handcuffed and surrounded by soldiers. He looked so vulnerable. My heart went out to him. One of the soldiers asked me the reason I was there. He said that they planned to kill my son. I couldn't handle it and screamed with all my might. I looked back at my son who looked so cold and petrified. I decided to sit on the ground in protest and wait for him to be released. An officer approached me and told me to go home. He said they would release him soon. He eventually came home freezing and terrified. It was the middle of the night.

One time, I was sitting here, while my daughters were downstairs,

when four soldiers burst into my house asking me where the olives were. I asked what olives they were looking for, but they ignored me, went into the kitchen and opened multiple jars looking for olives. When I understood that I was about to get robbed, I threatened to call the police. I couldn't believe how these soldiers had the audacity to burst into my house, rummage through my kitchen and steal my food. Once I called the police the four of them fled immediately.

Unfortunately, the coronavirus period has been a significant setback. We cannot sell the products, which we make from goats' milk, and are struggling financially. My children do not work and are stuck at home. As a respected woman, I am not able to fulfil my social duties in the community. I cannot visit friends and neighbors and I am unable to visit and console my friends who are mourning their recently lost loved ones. I find it very stressful to stay at home, since I am a social person and enjoy being with people.

Hamdeh Hamed Hasan al-Haddar | Susiya

Fatma Muhammad Nawaja'a ⁽⁴¹⁾
From Susiya

“

Everything depends on me
as a woman

”

My name is Fatma. I work as a social worker in an American NGO called Rebuilding Alliance in the South Hebron Hills. Together with my husband, we raise our two sons on our agricultural lands in Susiya. I was born in the ancient village of Susiya, and grew up there. In 1986 the army displaced us from our homes claiming that Susiya is an ancient archaeological site. We moved to our current location and set up on our agricultural lands, a few hundred meters from our village. Electricity lines, water pipelines, and services were extended to the settlement, established in 1983. The lines go through the area where we, the residents, are currently residing.

The Israelis fenced the archaeological site and settlers established an outpost. Even the tools we left behind in the caves, Israelis stole and claimed as part of their own Jewish heritage.

Our former village was a place which gathered people as a cohesive community. There were around 100 families in the

village. Even in the caves, every two families lived together in the same cave. There was more social convergence and closer relationships. The number of inhabitants was much larger. Now we are scattered, each family on their own lands, but we still function as a community entity.

Living under occupation is difficult, since it affects every aspect of our lives. Our economy, education, health, livelihood and our infrastructure are all controlled by the occupation, in one way or another. We often face closures, sometimes we are banned from entering specific areas, our lands get confiscated then used for the benefit of Israeli settlers. They prevent us from accessing water wells and block the roads so our children cannot go to school. Living next to settlers is very dangerous; they assault us physically and verbally, they use slingshots, canes, throw fire at our tents when we sleep, throw stones at us, hit our children and us women, and cut down our trees. Sometimes, they even come at night, when the children and

the elders are asleep to search our tents, disturbing their sleep and rest. These activities have increased in recent decades.

Can you imagine your life being monitored all the time by your enemy? We have no privacy here, in Susiya. They always send flying drones with cameras to monitor our activities. For example, my neighbor and I were spending time together, and suddenly, we saw a camera flying on top of us, filming us. When our kids play outside, one can see it recording them. I believe this is against human rights law. As a woman, or a child, I have the right to privacy.

Both settlers and the army make our lives hell. The army partially demolished the village 3 times, the last time in 2000. After the displacement, we had to rebuild our homes, which created economic challenges for us, since we do not have enough land to plant and pasture. We always worry whether our crops will be sufficient to feed us for the year. Not to mention, we also need to buy fodder for the

cattle, which is expensive, and we are simple people, we do not have a great amount of income, nor do we get government relief or international assistance. I remember when we were expelled, my father had to dig a new cave with his own bare hands, we also had to dig wells. It is like restarting from nothing. It is very hard. It is a huge financial burden, and very time consuming.

In 2009, when the government destroyed my tent, I had to stay at my sister's and brother's tents. I stayed there for almost two weeks, because it takes a lot of time to set up a tent from scratch. When they destroy tents, they usually either confiscate them or just tear them down, breaking everything. In order to rebuild, you have to purchase all the materials, which is costly.

Do you know that every building in Susiya has a demolition warrant? Even the school has one; it can be torn down at any moment. Here, we live in constant fear of being left with no home or school. School here is

Fatma Muhammad Nawaja'a | Susiya

only until tenth grade. The older children need to go to At Tuwani to attend the higher grades. This is all under the claim that we are illegal residents, living in an outpost with no building permits. When we apply for permits, they are not granted, claiming the lack of infrastructure, which they withhold.

Water pipelines pass right next to us and go directly to the settlers, but we are not allowed to use them. The Israeli government does not allow us to build legally, but, in reality, they are the ones depriving and prohibiting us from building. We have no basic infrastructure. Clinics, hospitals, and even health caravans for women are not allowed here. Whoever has an emergency needs to travel to the city of Yatta and pass through the military checkpoint. I know women who were pregnant, but lost their babies due to delays at the checkpoint and had to take alternative indirect routes to reach the clinics in Yatta, which adds additional time to the journey.

When we, the women, go to the valleys or the mountains to pasture the sheep, or when we go to the fields to work with the family, we face numerous attacks from the settlers and the Israeli army. One time when my sister and I were picking gundelias, a settler chased us, prevented us from picking, and expelled us from our lands, which they tried to confiscate and seize. He did not hit me, but he did assault my sister who was standing closer to him. This incident has greatly affected me, and has caused me psychological pain. I feel enraged how an Israeli settler like him, supported by the Israeli army, can come and go freely as he wishes through our lands.

We know the Israeli government's plans for our lands - it wants to annex them so they can establish a bigger settlement of Susiya, in order to build projects for the settlers, replacing and displacing us. We try to stand against them by turning to the courts - to file a lawsuit against the settlers and the Israeli army. We consulted with Quamar Mishirqi-Assad

from Haqel, in the hope of being able to gain building permits, to remain here and to prevent our houses from being demolished. Women in Susiya, who own lands, filed a lawsuit and sent all their paperwork to the lawyer so they can retain ownership of their lands and protect it. Quamar helps us to defend our homes, to stop the demolitions, and to gain permits. We are facing the Regavim NGO, which claims that our existence here is illegal, and that our village is an illegal outpost. In effect the army issued demolitions for all the structures in the village. We fear that demolitions could take place at any time. The risks are greater during the pandemic, when there is no international supervision.

During the Coronavirus the government carried out a lot of demolitions in the South Hebron Hills. Water wells were destroyed and violations were committed. Crops were ruined by tanks during military exercises. They set up extra checkpoints, prevented people from travelling and held them for hours during this period.

I participated in an advocacy talk to US congress members in the United States. I travelled to the US with my children. Ten members of congress signed a petition to demand that Netanyahu stop the threat of the demolition of the village of Susiya. During the session, we described how it is to live under occupation and how it affects us as women and children. We described our suffering, the demolitions, and the daily complications we face. We, as women, demand to live safely, in our homes. Our children should live in security and should be able to go to school without harm. We have the right to a life of dignity, to be able to travel freely, to have basic services and to get our social and health rights. We want homes built with stones, not tents, that can protect us during the summer and winter.

The pandemic has affected us women greatly. Personally, life conditions have become harder and the demands on me have increased. We need to provide technology for our

Fatma Muhammad Nawaja'a | Susiya

children, so they can get their education, to supply internet access and electronic devices for online classes. We have more expenses, but less income. With the closure, psychological pressure increased, because the whole family is at home. My responsibilities as a woman have doubled; I need to cook, monitor the kids, teach, work, manage the house, the cattle, and feed and dress everyone. I need to take care of my family in every aspect of life. Everything depends on me as a woman in this pandemic. I have not gone to work during the pandemic, so my income has decreased. My work has accumulated, and when I finally go back to work, I will have greater pressure. The stress and hardship will be increased as I have to pass through checkpoints and deal with army closures.

The Village of Susiya

The village of Susiya is located in the South Hebron Hills in an area currently defined as Area C. The settlement of Susiya and the archeological site of Susiya were established on the lands of the village. There are 350 residents in the village of Susiya, of whom 158 are women. The primary source of income is from traditional agriculture, land cultivation, the harvesting of olives, sheep grazing and subsistence off the production of milk and cheese. Susiya is not connected to water, electricity, or basic infrastructure. The villagers utilize stored rainwater from cisterns dug by their ancestors on their privately-owned lands, but in order to ensure a sufficient supply of water, families are forced to purchase water tanks from the city of Yatta. Yatta is the urban center providing services and goods to the surrounding villages, including Susiya. The relationship between the city and villages is based on mutual reliance.

For many years, the state has made systematic efforts to expel the villagers from their lands. In 1983 the settlement of Susiya was established on the lands of the village of Susiya. In 1986, a public expropriation order was issued for the lands of ancient Susiya and the village was declared an archeological site. Following the expropriation, the residents were expelled from the village and had no choice but to settle on their agricultural lands, a few hundred meters from the ancient village. In the 90s, the army displaced the villagers twice and in 2001, the villagers were displaced yet again. Over the period of a few days, tents and caves were destroyed, cisterns were blocked and damaged, fields were vandalized and farm animals were killed. In response to the displacement, the villagers submitted a petition to the High





Court of Justice, which granted an interim order preventing further demolitions. The village residents have worked tirelessly since, to regulate the village and even filed a petition in this regard. Over the years, Israel has not initiated a master plan for the village, despite its duty to do so, according to international law and as part of its obligation to the local population. All requests for building permits submitted by the villagers have been rejected, and the buildings in the village are still defined as illegal and are under the constant threat of demolition. A High Court appeal was submitted in 2014 regarding the rejection of the master plan which would have allowed for the development and permanence of the village.

With total impunity settlers have used ongoing violence, harassment and the prevention of access to the village lands. In 2010, the residents filed a petition against settler violence. In response to the petition the state committed to allowing the residents of the village to cultivate their lands and issued closure orders against settlers in areas faced with ongoing attacks. The closure orders are not always enforced.

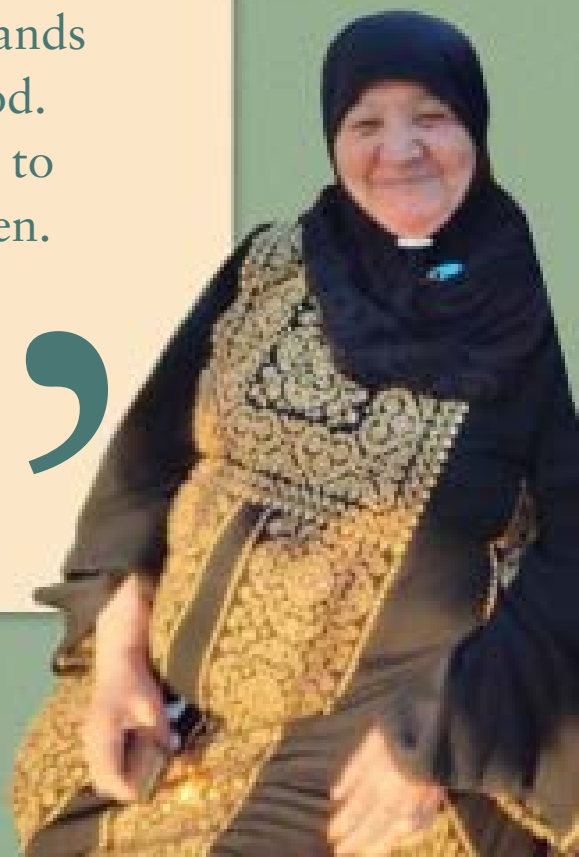
Faizeh Abd al-Rahim Mousa (64)

From Qaryut

“

When the settlers captured and destroyed our land, they cut down our trees. I had a mental breakdown. I cried so many nights, and I still do. This was my work. I invested my all in these lands - it was my heart's blood. This land is as precious to me as one of my children.

”



My name is Faizeh. I have seven daughters and 6 sons. All my children are married and live in their own homes. My husband died in 2017 from cancer, so I now live alone. I do not have any source of income, but my children, may God bless them, provide for me with whatever I need. I need several medications, and each of them contributes to cover my bills. I do not receive any kind of government support, but my life is very simple, thank God.

I live in a village called Qaryut, on the outskirts of Nablus. The settlement of Shiloh was built on part of the village's lands. In the seventies, my husband and I planted our lands with olive trees and almond trees. We planted, cared for, ploughed and watered plenty of trees.

My land is located in the western part of Shiloh. I would go there by donkey and care for the land with my bare hands. When the settlers captured and destroyed our land, they cut down our trees. In the year 2000 we were expelled from our lands. Settlers invaded our lands and our home

and painted our house red. It became known as the red house outpost. Settlers would attack us repeatedly. We could not return to these lands. Our house was eventually demolished. No one compensated us. We also had a cave, which Israelis took over. They put in a carpet and other possessions and claimed it as a part of their own heritage.

I had trouble raising my children under occupation. My son Jibril was hit on the head by settlers, and we had to take him to the hospital for treatment. We had to pay a huge fee just to get him to the hospital to receive the proper care. God knows how much we suffered in our lives, I was humiliated on numerous occasions, lived in the cold, and barely had anything to eat. We did not receive any financial support from anyone, but I worked tenaciously; I was unrelenting. I had a mental breakdown. I cried so many nights, and I still do. This was my work, I invested my all in these lands, it was my heart's blood. It pained me so much. I cared and still care for these lands. These

lands are the product of our work there; our blood, sweat and tears. I look at them now and cry all the time, these are what is left of my husband, may his soul rest in peace. Only God knows how much I put effort into these lands. Whether it was during the burning summer, fasting during Ramadan, or during the worst days of my life, I would still go there and care for the trees. My life has always been very tiring, and this was very humiliating as well as very belittling. However, my family and I will not forget or give up. This land is as precious to me as one of my children. One who works tirelessly for something, and suffers through the pain cannot abandon it easily.

Nowadays, the settlers steal my olives; they harvest most of our trees and we barely have anything left. My grandchildren go every now and then to pick olives for us, but it is barely enough. Our lawyer, Quamar, may God bless her, she was the one who worked hard to help us, guided us, prepared our documents and took us to court.

After a 16-year legal battle we finally returned to our lands.

I always pray; asking God to help me, my children and those who are suffering; to help alleviate all of our pain. My heart is very tired, the terrain here and the bad roads do not make it easy for me to visit my children. The environment here is not accommodating to my health conditions. I barely leave the house now and my children stop by every now and then to check up on me.

The military enters the village often in order to create restlessness. They spray teargas and clash with the people here, but because we live between settlements, they try not to create too much hassle because they fear the settlers may rise up against them. Living like this between Israeli settlements instills panic in my heart. My grandchildren are scared of going close to the settlements for fear of settler attacks. The settlers throw rocks at us, while they are under the military's protection. Life here is full

Faizeh Abd al-Rahim Mousa | Qaryut

of terror, which is one of the reasons I do not like to leave the house very much. I always have to use my respirator when they throw teargas canisters because my health cannot handle it. The military once threw teargas canisters when I was sitting on my balcony and I had to use my respirator to breathe. The constant stress is exhausting. The occupation affects every aspect of my life.

It is frightening how many houses here have a demolition order. Three of my neighbors' homes are in danger of being demolished, which is very sad and worrying. My children also don't have a permit to build on our land, and certainly will not receive one due to Israel's racist policies.

We have one clinic in our village, but it barely functions. There are no hospitals nearby. I once felt really fatigued and my blood pressure suddenly dropped. I had to order a taxi to take me to a private doctor to get treated. Since the clinic is not very reliable, I go to this private doctor

whenever I need something urgent. My medical bills are very expensive, and my children need to cover those costs.

I wish all the happiness and benevolence to our lawyer, Quamar. I am very thankful to her, since only due to her strength and God's will were we able to get back our lands. I do not want to imagine what could have happened if she had not represented us. She has given us not only legal, but emotional support too. She is a very strong woman who tenaciously clung to our case and worked hard to enable us to uphold our right to this land. Before my husband died, he requested that Quamar protect our lands.

Whenever we need to go to the land to farm, we ask Quamar to make the proper prior arrangements. We need to coordinate with the military whenever we want to access our lands. We can only work our lands on specific days and at certain hours and we cannot access the land without coordination and permission.

This has a negative effect on the land and our crops as we cannot tend to them fully. I am always anxious about the land. I cry when I think about how hard we worked to plant and work our lands. I feel uneasy thinking about what the settlers are doing to our land and what havoc they wreak. On the coordinated work day, I instruct my children to take pictures of the lands for me, of everything in it and of any changes, because I dearly miss it and I grieve for it. My son does not have a tractor to work the land, which is one of the reasons they do not allow him to access it.

I still have not gotten vaccinated for the coronavirus. Even though the mask suffocates me whenever I need to wear it, I am terrified of getting the vaccine. I am not sure if my body and heart can handle it. During the pandemic, receiving medical attention was a difficult feat, because all the roads were closed, and we could not go neither to the Palestinian territories nor to Israeli ones. Moreover, we had an economic crisis due to

everyone staying at home or losing their jobs. My children remained steady and went to the land on every coordinated day. We did not leave our land alone. It is a part of us.

Two years ago, I travelled to Amman, Jordan, but could not stay there for long since my medications are more expensive there. I went through the King Hussein Bridge, near Jericho, which falls under Israel's control. There were Israeli soldiers manning the checkpoint, who kept us there unnecessarily for a long time. I felt overly exhausted and sore all over that day. It took a long time to travel to the crossing and the lines were very long. It took a lot of time for everybody to get checked. Some people's belongings were confiscated. I spent around five hours at that checkpoint.

I made a pilgrimage once, 12 years ago, to Saudi Arabia with a group of people. That trip was also tiring. I took my youngest, Jibril, who was 15 years at the time, with me. We had to cross through the King

Hussein Bridge, which was also a lengthy wait. They gave us a lot of trouble. We then had to travel by bus from Jordan to Mecca. Back then it was overly taxing, I do not imagine I could repeat it now.

The Village of Qaryut

Qaryut is one of the largest Palestinian villages in the Nablus Governorate, located 17km south of the city of Nablus. The current population is 3,000 people of which 1,932 are women. The economy of Qaryut, once almost exclusively dependent on agriculture, has become more dependent on other forms of income, as thousands of dunams of lands have been expropriated. The dependence on the farming of olives, almonds and grains has significantly decreased as result of land takeover and settlement expansion. According to the Oslo accords, the western and southern areas of the village lie within the area known as Area C, in which construction and building is illegal, resulting in ongoing demolitions of homes and essential structures.

The Israeli presence and attempts to confiscate lands began in 1978. Thousands of dunams of land belonging to the village of Qaryut have been confiscated by Israel, primarily for the purpose of establishing settlements, military bases and the construction of roads to settlements.





The settlement of Shilo to the south of the village, took over vast tracts of lands of Qaryut, closing the main road to the village and preventing free land access to agricultural lands. To the west, the settlement of Eli dominates the hill tops surrounding Qaryut, forcing landowners to coordinate land access on specific days and not according to agricultural needs to tend the lands. The settlement of Shvut Rachel is located southeast of the village. The presence of these ever-expanding settlements and an additional 5 illegal outposts puts increased pressure on farmers to maintain ongoing land access for fear of losing their lands. In addition to land expropriation, settlers use attacks and extreme violence to prevent land access leading to further land grabs. These attacks have had a profoundly negative impact on the village residents and their property.

Halima Muhammad Yussef Abu Eram (79)

From Jinba

“

It was a period of absolute
terror, and worry, but I have
faith and trust in God.

”



My name is Halima. I am 79 years old, which means that I was born in 1942. I live in Khirbet Jinba, or the Village of Caves. My family has been living here since my grandfather bought these lands, during the Othman period. My father and my father in law are brothers, so we inherited the place entirely. Around four generations of my family lived in Khirbet Jinba, my grandchildren are the fifth generation. I raised four boys and three girls.

I got married when I was 24 years old, which was fairly late for women here, while some of my siblings married at the age of 16 or younger. I currently live with my eldest son with his wife, his seven girls and five boys. My son supports all of us financially; he is a shepherd as well as an excellent farmer. His wife takes care of the children and manages the household.

We have our own cave, which is divided into sections. Long ago, one part of it was dedicated for the cattle, another part for storing hay, and one was our

living space. We would have all kinds of cattle living under the same roof as us, such as sheep, goats, camels, cows and oxes with plows. We would care for them and bring them water from outside and feed them. Nowadays, only family members live in the cave. The cattle have their own huts next to us, where they can graze in the land as they please. Our lifestyle changed. It is preferable to maintain cleanliness and not have the cattle living with the children and the family. Back then, one had to deal with their waste, and clean the house multiple times a day, which was very tiring, especially while trying to balance all the other chores as well as farming the land. We do not use oxes and camels to plow the land anymore, now we use vehicles; tractors and harvesters. It is more convenient this way, takes less time and is less tiring.

I spent most of my life farming my land. I would go to the fields every day and work the lands myself. Women's work is different now. We use milk

Halima Muhammad Yussef Abu Eram | Jinba

harvesters instead of traditional milking. We also use mixers to process the milk and produce dairy products. Our work now is more focused towards dairy production, baking and caring for the cattle.

Life under occupation has been marked by so much suffering. In an attempt to displace us, the occupation forces demolished our properties on multiple occasions. Military forces stole our furniture and all our belongings and threw them away. They would loot all of our food, without leaving any speck for us to eat or drink. When we finally got an injunction order to stop the demolitions, the situation slightly improved. In 1985, the occupation forces demolished a lot of buildings. They issued demolition orders and destroyed our huts. They also destroyed the fodder for our animals. They told us to leave, but we remained and even slept in the open. Every time they destroy, we build over and over again.

There were some very frightful experiences and the people of

Jinba escaped to the mountains because the occupation forces wanted to tie us up and torture us. Most of the women and some of the men would leave the village and run to the mountains, leaving the occupation forces alone to destroy and steal our properties and everything we owned. I witnessed an extraordinary amount of extreme violence in my life here.

They made us suffer so much. When we lived in a tent, Israelis would always come to threaten us; they would come during the night and destroy our furniture. They would remove the covers from my sleeping children forcefully and disturb their rest. I told them to have mercy on them, but they did not care. Even our clothes, those Israeli soldiers would throw them to the ground and trample on them. But, we, the women, would not allow them to touch us at all, we would run away to the mountains instead. Once we heard that they were coming to break in. We got dressed quickly, put on our headcovers and ran to the mountains. It

Halima Muhammad Yussef Abu Eram | Jinba

is important to mention that whenever we received aid from the city of Yatta, the Israelis would not allow us to get the aid. The people of Yatta would send us blankets and food, but the occupation forces would set up blockades and checkpoints in order to prevent us from getting our basic supplies.

After they broke into our house and wreaked havoc, we would come back to find that they spilled all the juice on top of the food. They would throw away the yogurt that I worked so hard to make. Then we would begin the process of rearranging everything that was left, and attempt to fix what they destroyed, and clean all the mess that they created. This process lasted for almost a week and another two months of savings in order to replace what the occupation forces destroyed. We would also need to provide food for the cattle which they trashed. Not to mention that they stole our gas cylinders causing us maximum financial damage.

In Khirbet Jinba there is only one clinic, which operates once a week, on Tuesday. When my daughter in law had a miscarriage, she was close to death. We had to take her to Yatta and then to the hospital in Hebron. We drove her in a tractor to the ambulance, which was waiting on the main road. The journey took almost an hour because the shortcut had been blocked. Then, the ambulance drove her to the hospital, taking another hour. By then she had lost a huge amount of blood, and her condition only worsened. They needed to do multiple blood transfusions to save her life. Thankfully, she got better and her condition improved.

It was a rough time back then; as we had to endure the stress and fear of losing her if she did not receive the proper care on time. Not to mention that since my son and his wife have seven children, everything fell on me when their mother fell ill. I had to feed the children and take care of them. I also had to manage all the cooking. Additionally, the milk had to be extracted and

prepared, which was already my responsibility. The government, unfortunately, did not offer aid, nor did they assign a temporary caretaker to help.

Our legal struggle was about a section of a road that the Israelis tried to close. We suffered for eight years while trying to reopen it for our community's use. In 2001, whenever we tried to cross the road with our tractor, the Israelis would forbid us from doing so, and compel us to turn around. Thankfully, instead of a trip to Yatta requiring three hours, it would take us half the time now that we have access to the road. It is so much more convenient. We can go buy fodder for the animals easily, and we can come and go whenever we need to.

Demolitions are a regular occurrence in the village. Our summer huts were demolished more than three times.

Two of my children got infected with the coronavirus. I was terrified for them because I had relatives in Yatta who died from

the virus. We had to stay isolated for 25 days. It was a period of absolute terror, and worry, but I have faith and trust in God. My children were very careful with my health and always warned me against leaving the house. I had to cancel partaking in numerous events, because I was very afraid. My family had to apologize and decline attending many ceremonies, which had a negative impact on us socially since we could not perform our proper duties towards the people who held these events. We also could not hold prayer together due to the closure of the mosque. My family and the community suffered socially from the Coronavirus.

Halima Muhammad Yussef Abu Eram | Jinba

The Village of Jinba

The village of Jinba is located in the area known as Masafer Yatta in the South Hebron Hills and constitutes one of the main villages servicing the area and the surrounding villages. Jinba is one of the largest villages in Masafer Yatta. Jinba has a clinic, a school and a mosque and is home to the local area council of Masafer Yatta. The village is located on a hill, adjacent to a mountain, hence the name of the village - reminiscent of a child sitting next to his mother. A water spring is located at the foot of the mountain. The village of Jinba is historic and its residents have known the importance of water since ancient times. Grapes, figs and pomegranates were planted in the village. Over 100 wells were built to collect rainwater. The remains of ancient trees and vineyards are still evident in the village. Today, Jinba has a population of 550 people, half of which are women. The villagers are primarily dependent on agriculture and shepherding. There are 3,000 heads of sheep and goats in the village. Winter crops are also cultivated.

Jinba, like other Palestinian villages in Masafer Yatta, has suffered from the occupation. Extensive lands were burnt in 1951 by the Israeli army. In 1966 Israel destroyed most of the homes in the village and in 1985 again carried out demolitions. In the early 1980s, the Israeli military declared an area of about 30,000 dunams in the South Hebron Hills in the Masafer





Yatta region, a restricted military zone, and dubbed it 'Firing Zone 918'. 12 villages fall inside the Firing Zone. In 1999 the army issued evacuation orders following which 700 residents were evacuated from villages in the Firing Zone. Further extensive demolitions took place in 2016.

The villagers have been waging a 22-year legal battle to prevent their evacuation from their homes. The final decision of the High Court of Justice is still pending.

Like the other villages in Masafer Yatta, Israel has not developed a plan for the village and building permits are unattainable. Natural growth and overcrowding have forced the villagers to build despite the fact that they are unable to gain permits to build legally. The village is plagued by confiscations, destruction of lands and road closures.

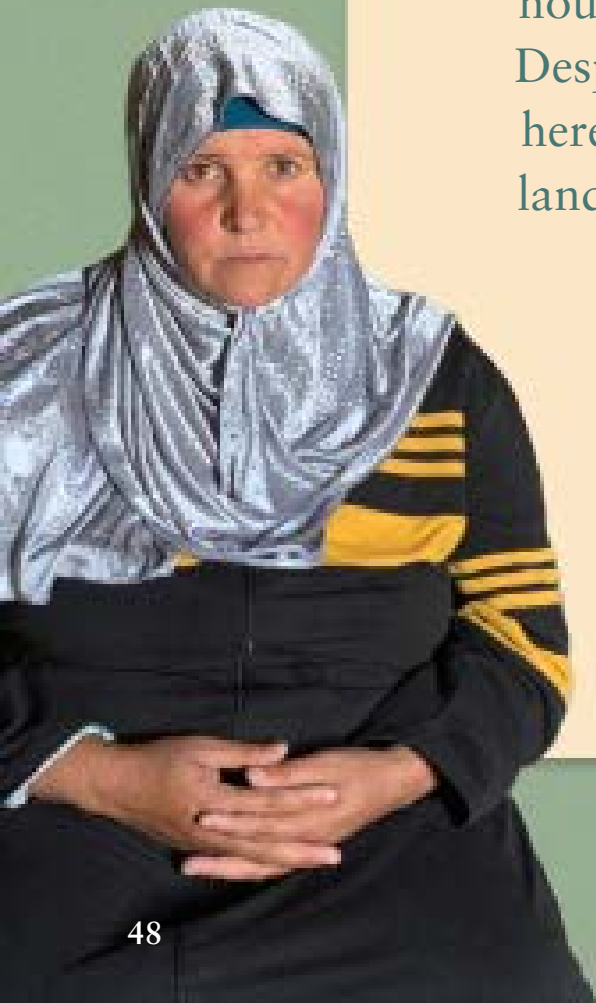
Farseh Rasmi Yussef Abu Aram (47)

From Khirbet Ar Rakeez

“

Despite the fact that they shot my son and demolished my house, we will not give up. Despite how arduous life is here, we will not leave our lands. I will remain here as long as I am alive

”



My name is Farseh, but they call me Um Haroun, which means the mother of Haroun. I am the mother of four children; two boys and two girls. The six of us live in this cave together. We have been living here for eight years.

Living under occupation is unbearable; one cannot take a breather at all. It is a very challenging, tiring feat. We have no access to infrastructure or basic services and our access to electricity is limited to a specific amount a day. We are not allowed to extend power lines, even from the closest village, A-Tuwani.

When we finally saved enough money to buy a generator, the occupation did not allow that. On January 1st, the soldiers forcefully entered our neighbor's home and stole the generator. My poor son tried to stand up to them and prevent them from confiscating it, even though I told him that he should let go, because it wasn't worth it and they could shoot him. And they did. They shot him at close

range - no more than two meters. He is now completely paralyzed. They then obstructed the vehicle that tried to transport him to receive immediate treatment by shooting at it. It was one of the worst days of my life. My son was seriously injured, and needs artificial ventilation to breathe. He is in Al-Ahli Hospital in Hebron. My son got shot in the neck, injuring the nerves and the spine, which resulted in quadriplegia. This all happened because he was trying to prevent the soldiers from stealing a generator that we desperately needed. He was protecting his father and our neighbor, so they shot him.

Ashraf, our neighbor, was building an enclosure to house the cattle. Anyone who attempts to build anything, whether a shed, a water well, a bathroom or a garden, Israeli soldiers will demolish it. They will not allow us to work or do anything at all. Look at us, we live in a cave, but we cannot expand it or build anything in it. There is always a drone that photographs everything

we do here. The settlers, too, watch us very closely and spy on us. Whenever they see something they don't like, they immediately report it to their army. The next day one can expect a brutal visit from the soldiers, who will unforgivingly destroy everything in their wake.

I wish we could build, like the settlers, who can build whatever they want. They also have running water and electricity. We are living on our own lands, but nothing is provided for us, but the settlers who live on our land, have their needs provided. My family and I built a house once, but it got demolished a week later. We were delighted that we finally had a house and got to live in it. But Israel had to take the joy from our hearts. It cost us 17,000 NIS to build a 35-meter house with two rooms and it was destroyed. We lost all that money. It is very depressing; putting all that effort and hope in the house, then you witness it being destroyed in a blink of an eye. We returned to living in the cave, as we had before.

I wish we had electricity all the time. I wish we could buy an electric heater that I could use during the cold winter days and use a fan during the heat. I wish we could own a washing machine. I wish I had a fridge to store food. I wish we could have a house with tiled floors. I mean, who does not want that? While people usually clean dishes in a



kitchen sink, we clean them on the floor. Everywhere you look here there is dirt, it is impossible to clean properly. Despite the fact that they shot my son

Farseh Rasmi Yussef Abu Aram | Khirbet Ar Rakeez

and demolished my house, we will not give up. Despite how arduous life is here, we will not leave our lands. I will remain here as long as I am alive.

Ramadan, the holy month, has come upon us, but our psyche has yet to be relieved. We cannot see the light, nor can we see the good in this world. Everything is just terrible. The occupation has destroyed us; they killed my son, they ruined his future. Thank God he resisted them, but they still shot him. I remember myself screaming, I tried to help him, but he was not able to talk, I thought he was dead. Every time I remember the incident I bellow and shout, that is how I try to cope with what happened.

My son is still paralyzed, they will bring him to me from the hospital after Eid. They did not do anything to improve his state. Even Israeli hospitals refuse to treat him. I wish they would treat him in Israeli hospitals; I wish to see him move his hands or feet at least. I know he will not go back to

the way he was, but let him at least have some movement in his limbs. Currently, he is living on painkillers and an oxygen tank. How would I even take care of him? I am not a nurse. I have no idea how to move him or clean him. I have hope that my son will live.

Our financial situation is dire. It is extremely bad. Even those who said they will send us aid, unfortunately, did not. No organization has reached out to help us. Even the Palestinian authority did not check on us. No one helped us with even one shekel. Even though the PA usually sends monetary aid to the families of those imprisoned in Israeli jails and those who were wounded by Israeli military, Haroun still has not received anything. We are only living off of our cattle; we have 25 goats. They're not enough, but we are trying to manage, including affording to visit Haroun in the hospital daily. I wish someone would sponsor a project that can help us do something here. We

have capabilities, and we love to work, we just need opportunities.

Life has become harder after my son was shot. We barely stay at home; my children stay here, but I am usually at the hospital with Haroun, from the morning until sunset. I come back home, hungry and tired, but no one prepares food. I have to prepare food for the family when I return. Then I do all the house chores; I only get time to wash the laundry with my own bare hands at two in the morning.

Thank God My son's condition is improving each day. Now, he can eat all the food and snacks that I buy him. He speaks normally as well, and remembers everything. He asks me about his siblings and what we do at home. He wants to know what we eat and about everything that happens. Haroun also wonders when he can come back home and asks me how he can live paralyzed like this. I comfort him and stay strong for him. I encourage him not to give up, telling him that

he can live and get better. Thank God for everything, what can we do otherwise? That is our fate, and we will have to be patient. Hopefully, the soldier who shot him will be court marshalled and receive his proper punishment.

The pandemic has affected us negatively. It has doubled the stress of Haroun's situation. The children stopped going to school, people could not leave the house, unemployment increased, and we were not able to buy essential goods. I had to always wear the mask in the hospital, which was stifling and uncomfortable. I was always terrified of catching the virus while visiting my son in the hospital and infecting the rest of my family. I feared for my children's health; children are a blessing and a huge responsibility.

Settlers and Israeli soldier's activity have increased with the pandemic. They antagonize us day and night. They try to provoke us and cause trouble. The military also sets the settlers loose on us. They never leave us alone. Honestly, we do not want anything from them. I

Farseh Rasmi Yussef Abu Aram | Khirbet Ar Rakeez

wish they would just leave us alone, so we can live. What can we do? I mean, it is not like we can stay silent when they attack us, it is only natural that we defend ourselves. For example, whenever we let out the goats to graze, the settlers chase them off the land. If someone goes for a walk, the settlers provoke them and try to rile them up. Their presence here is aggravating; their only goal is to suffocate us.

The village of Ar Rakeez

The community of Ar Rakeez is part of the At Tuwani Village Council and is bordered to the southwest by the outpost of Avigail and to the east by Havat Maon, both of which are inhabited by extreme right-wing settlers. There are 50 people living in the village of which 23 are women. Two extended families inhabit the village - the Hamamda and Abu Aram families. The main source of income for the village is agriculture and shepherding. Every family has a solar panel for electricity and heating water. The children of the village attend the school in At Tuwani and the residents of Ar Rakeez rely on the clinic and social services of At Tuwani. Avigail was established in 2003 on the lands of Ar Rakeez and a road was paved for the settlers on the lands of the village. The residents of the village suffer from ongoing attacks and harassment by the settlers who graze their sheep on the village lands and use drones to film and terrorize the villagers.

Almost half of the village of Ar Rakeez is located within the 918 Firing Zone* (see background on the village of Jinba). The army prevents any form of construction including the building of homes and paving of roads. Multiple structures and homes have been demolished in the village. The village is not connected to the water and electricity networks. Dozens of olive and grape trees have been uprooted and destroyed by the army, on the pretext that these are state lands.

On January 1st this year, Harun Abu Aram was shot by the army during the confiscation of a generator. Harun was left a quadriplegic and is in full-time medical care.



Feryal Rashad Khamis Abu Haikal (75) f\

From Tel Rumeida

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As a woman who lives
under occupation, I do not
feel like the occupation is
an obstruction, but rather
a motivator

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I was born in 1946. I have eleven grown children; six boys and five girls. I am also a grandmother to 17 grandchildren. Two of my sons still live with me and my husband here in Tel Rumeida, while the others visit us during the week. Since my husband cannot work anymore, my family and I rely on my pension to pay our bills and living costs ever since I retired from my job as a school headmistress and a teacher. My brothers-in-law also live in Tel Rumeida, along with two of my sons.

In 1984, there was a wave of violence launched by Israelis here in Tel Rumeida. They threw tear gas bombs, stun grenades and violently attacked Palestinians. A few times, stun grenades were thrown through the window right into our homes. This brutality has led many families, who could not handle the pressure, to fear for their lives and leave the area.

My family used to live near al-Haram al-Ibrahimi, where the eastern gate was. The Jordanian government started to expand

the area around al Haram al-Ibrahimi before the Israelis occupied it. Of course, Israel benefited from these expansions to impose its control over the place. We had to move from there in 1971, and I have been living here ever since; I got married and gave birth to my children here. I experienced the shock and despair caused by the occupation of Hebron. During the war of 1967, I was only 21 years old and about to graduate.

I am extremely proud of my children; all of them are educated and work in high positions. Seven of them are engineers, and all of them are hard working specialists and experts in their field. They accomplished so much, and living here did not deter us from pursuing our dreams or setting goals. The fact that we live here under occupation encourages us, parents, to educate our children and press them harder to make something of themselves in order to prove our perseverance in our homeland.

Feryal Rashad Khamis Abu Haikal | Tel Rumeida

Dealing with the occupation demands more time than raising my children. Surveying what happens on the land and protecting it requires a huge amount of time and attention. I had to always stand up against any kind of assault and keep my eyes open to all harm they may cause, since this is a targeted area due to its significant location. Israel has interest in this area, which is the reason for all these excavation attempts, due to it being an important ancient archeological site. This area is precious to us, that is why we hold on to it strongly.

In 2004, as I was coming home from work as a school headmistress, we heard about someone committing an attack against Israeli soldiers. As a result, they declared a high alert situation all over the area, during which they refused us entry to our own homes. My children, who were at home, were also ejected forcefully into the yard. The soldiers broke into our house, shot at all of our beds, at closed bags, at our high attic, and at closed doors. Even

the washing machine that was full of laundry had bullet holes. It was such a difficult day. My poor daughters were terrified as they thought they were planning to expel us. There were other situations just as terrifying as this one. They enter our land as if it is their own, even opening the door to our home once.

One of the challenging situations was when they would break into our house and order us to stand outside in the land. They would surround us, even the young children. Once, we had a teapot prepared with tea cups to bring with us. We started serving tea and pouring in the cups to show them that we are calm and are not afraid of them. However, they forbade us from drinking the tea and confiscated it. I had some watermelon seeds in my pocket, so I offered some to my neighbours and distributed it to them, conveying how steadfast we are.

I was constantly worried while raising my children. I always wondered whenever I sent them to school if they would be okay,

Feryal Rashad Khamis Abu Haikal | Tel Rumeida

whether they would get assaulted by settlers and when they would be back home from school. Not to mention, when my children went to study abroad, they had to travel to Jordan first and then travel to their destination. This costs a lot of money and so much extra effort.

All these onslaughts are part of a strategic plan which aims to make our lives a living hell. Settler assault is a normal thing which everybody here has faced. These are well planned and structured policies of occupation. Their existence here is undoubtedly programmed to incapacitate us. When we call the police on them - the Israeli police, of course, since the Palestinian police has no jurisdiction here, they do not answer our calls. When I was the headmistress, I used to tell all the students to gather at my house so we could all go together as a group to school, so that none of them would get assaulted by settlers. I would always remind them that they cannot, under any circumstance, come late to school. Even when school finishes, we would all gather and head home.

One time, the settlers forbade us from leaving school. I tried calling the police and the military, but it did not work. The settlers remained standing in front of our school, preventing us from leaving. After an hour of waiting, I stood up first, with some teachers behind me, then the students behind us, along with the rest of the teachers flanking them from behind. We broke through them. There was nothing else we could do. We kept going, but some of my students got into fights with some of the settler youngsters. As we marched on, suddenly, a group of settlers began throwing stones at my students. One of those who got hit was my daughter. It was such a grim day. Eventually, we had to start thinking about alternative ways to get to and from school in order to avoid clashes with them.

The first goal of our existence here is to maintain peace. In other words, we do not harm anybody nor do we want anyone to hurt us. However, these settlers do not want to understand this. I tell settlers that they are not better than me and they are the ones

attacking me and are trying to steal my land.

There used to be more barriers situated at the entrance of the town. We would have to park our cars outside and carry everything to our homes. Recently, it became a bit easier, cars can enter certain places in the village, but not all places. People still need to park their cars outside the barrier and walk all the way to their homes. Before buying cars, we also used to walk around 300 meters to get to the station where we could take a service taxi. Transportation, of course, is not organized; one could go there and wait for a long time for a taxi to arrive.

On multiple occasions settlers damaged our property. They would burn our grass when it was dry, and by the time the firefighters arrived, our olive trees would already be half burned. They even uprooted 29 trees from my land. They tried to uproot one of the trees to begin digging, but my daughter, who I recently lost to Covid, and

I sat under the tree and refused to move. The tree is still there now. Not to mention, when one of us falls ill and calls for an ambulance, the vehicle needs to go through the settlement, since the roads here are not paved.

As a woman who lives under occupation, I do not feel like the occupation is an obstruction, but rather a motivator to do whatever I want. Once, the settlers broke into our house and wanted to stay in a tent on our rooftop. I asked my children to bring everything that smells bad when burned such as tires. We put them all in the chimney and burnt them. Soon, the smoke was suffocating up on the roof and the settlers were forced to leave. We defend ourselves using these simple non-violent methods. We do not resort to violence the way they do.

Our legal struggle is preventing settlers from stealing our land and using it to plant their own trees and crops. They utilized the fact that this specific section of the land is quite far from our homes and we cannot see it or

Feryal Rashad Khamis Abu Haikal | Tel Rumeida

reach it all the time. One day I caught them planting on our land, so I reported them to the

Three months ago, I lost one of my daughters to the coronavirus. Arwa died a week after she got the virus. Everybody heard about it. They published articles titled “Hebron Mourns the Death of Ms. Arwa Abu Haikal”. Everyone loved her, she was such a charming person. She was only 47 years old, may her soul rest in peace.



police. When we managed to get back to our lands, I pulled out everything they planted. They do whatever they desire on our lands and it is frustrating. They even let their cattle loose here. When we argue with them about their behaviour, the military usually ends up evacuating us both from the land. They recently demolished a wall separating us from settlers, in order to gain free access to our archeology site without making their presence known. If they find archeological remains they will not rebuild what they demolished.

Feryal Rashad Khamis Abu Haikal | Tel Rumeida

The village of Tel Rumeida

Tel Rumeida is a neighborhood in the city of Hebron built on top of and around an archaeological mound referred to as “Tel Hebron” by Israelis and “Tel Rumeida” by Palestinians. Today, Tel Rumeida is located in a closed military area and is surrounded by military checkpoints and settlements. The settlement of Admot Yishai (Jesse’s Lands) was established on the tel. The Tel Rumeida neighborhood is located in the area known as H2, under full Israeli control. The lands comprising the tel contain agricultural lands including fruit trees, particularly olive trees. There are approximately 210 families living in Tel Rumeida. The area is fraught with political and religious tension. Freedom of movement is severely restricted and settler violence is rife.

Due to its historical significance, multiple archaeological excavations have taken place in Tel Rumeida and settlements were established as early as 1968. In 2018, sections of Tel Rumeida were declared an archaeological park and opened to the public³. A draconian military presence and ongoing attempts by settlers to maintain a Jewish presence in the area have created a living hell for the Palestinian families living in Tel Rumeida, so much so that many families have abandoned their homes and lands and left the community.

3. <https://emekshaveh.org/en/emek-shavehs-guide-to-tel-rumeida/>



Conclusion

International law states that the special status of women and children in society requires special consideration and specifies provisions protecting their rights in human rights law. These laws prohibit the violation of women's privacy and states that "the dignity of women shall be specially protected..."⁴. Like Israel's relinquishment of its obligations to protect residents of the occupied territories, including its obligation to ensure adequate living conditions and the prevention of physical harm, the State of Israel makes no attempt to prevent violations against women as evidenced by the complete disregard for this provision by Israel's duty bearers. The words of these women bear testimony to Israel's blatant violation of international law.

4. See Code of Conduct 134-135 of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention Relating to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War

Women the world over have personal, familial and professional aspirations and share life experiences in a male-dominated world. Despite the enormous and often insurmountable challenges of life in the occupied territories, the inner strength of women nurtures and builds family and community resilience using sheer determination to create the very best possible situation under extremely difficult circumstances. Women's empowerment is the source of social transformation and allows a full realization of the unique capacities of women.



Although women are at the very fringe of society, particularly under occupation, women are the embodiment of sumud – steadfastness and perseverance. The gentle power of women provides the family with the necessary backbone to survive the impossible reality of life in the occupied Palestinian territories. These testimonies describe the love and care given to the olive trees, the ultimate symbol of sumud, representing the rootedness and fortitude of women as caregivers and providers for their families and communities.

Women have a unique ability to organize and work for the betterment of their communities. In the village of At Tuwani, Kifah along with other women in the village, succeeded in building a school against extremely difficult odds. Today the school is attended by pupils from At Tuwani and neighboring villages and is an essential service enhancing the fabric of life in the region. The project committee established by Kifah, is the backbone of support to women in her community who lack the opportunities to realize their professional aspirations. The exceptional capabilities and vision of women is best stated by Kifah herself: “We plan then execute”. Under the extreme reality of life under occupation, women provide support to other women, a testimony to their kindred spirit.