

# 'Zionist Regime's Demolition of Palestinian Structures Up 10%'

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime's demolition and confiscation of Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank soared by ten percent last year as the regime continues with its land expropriation policies in the occupied territories in defiance of international law, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says.

"While in Area C, which makes over 60% of the area of the West Bank and is under full Israeli military control, the number of structures targeted in both years was approximately the same and stood at 270, occupied East Jerusalem (al-Quds) recorded a 25% increase compared to 2017. Of all structures targeted during 2018, 56 were donor-funded humanitarian aid structures, representing a 46% decline, compared to 2017 figures," the UN body said in a report published on Sunday.

The report added that two of this



This picture taken on November 21, 2018 shows two excavators of the al-Quds municipality, demolishing one of over a dozen shops in the Arab-inhabited Shuafat refugee camp in Israeli-annexed East al-Quds, which Zionist regime authorities said were built without a permit.

month's demolitions were on what regime officials described as punitive grounds, and the rest were due to the lack of difficult-to-obtain Israeli building permits.

"About 70% of the structures tar-

geted this month were in Area C. The largest incident took place on December 4th in the Beit Hanina – al-Marwaha neighborhood, a community on the 'al-Quds side' of the wall barrier, where eight commer-

cial structures were demolished and goods were confiscated.

"Five families, who reported a financial loss of almost 1.5 million Israeli shekels (\$400,000), were affected. In another incident, the livelihoods of 70 people were affected by the demolition of a leather store on the margins of al-Bireh City near the Ramallah district," OCHA pointed out.

Since 1967, the regime has been enforcing the draconian policy of demolishing the homes of those Palestinians who are deemed by Tel Aviv to be behind fatal attacks against Zionist settlers. The practice, however, was temporarily halted from 2005 to 2014, with the exception of 2009, when scores of homes were sealed and razed in East al-Quds.

Nevertheless, in 2014 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced as a policy the resumption of demolitions in the occupied West Bank.

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U.S.-based analysts have told Press TV that they believed either U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo or hawkish National Security Adviser John Bolton has ordered the arrest and other possible action against the Iranian broadcaster.

The targeting of Press TV comes amid a stepped-up U.S. pressure campaign against the Islamic Republic under the administration of President Donald Trump.

Iran's Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on Sunday "the barbaric behavior towards the Press TV journalist and the illegal treatment she has been subjected to are proof that the Americans only preach about human rights to others, while they commit themselves to the same approach which their vassal state adopted in dealing with Khashoggi," referring to Saudi Arabia which stands accused of murdering prominent journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

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The three survivors of the sinking were plucked to safety by an Italian navy helicopter on Friday afternoon, the navy said.

The Italian navy said when its patrol plane first spotted the sinking dinghy it had about 20 persons aboard. The plane's crew launched two life rafts near the dinghy, which inflated, and a navy destroyer 100 nautical (200 kilometers) away sent a helicopter to the scene.

That helicopter rescued the survivors, two from a life raft and one from the water, the navy said, adding that all had hypothermia.

They were flown to Lampedusa, an Italian island near Sicily, and treated in a hospital, Di Giacomo said.

Many migrants cannot afford to pay for life vests, an extra cost when boarding a smuggler's boat in Libya. The survivors said the migrants aboard the dinghy didn't have any.

It wasn't immediately clear exactly how many migrants might have died before the navy plane spotted the sinking dinghy.

The Italian Coast Guard says Libya asked a nearby cargo ship to search for survivors but the ship reported it found no one.

Libyan navy spokesman Ayoub Gassim said one of its boats was sent Friday to the scene but it "had a mechanical issue and we had to call it back." The official said 50 migrants were believed to have been aboard the dinghy when it set sail.

According to the IOM, at least 2,297 people died at sea or went missing trying to reach Europe in 2018. In all, 116,959 migrants reached Europe by sea routes last year, it says.

The UN refugee agency UNHCR, said Saturday it was "appalled" at the news of the latest migrant deaths in the Mediterranean. In a statement from its Geneva headquarters, it said in addition to those missing off Libya, 53 people died in recent days in the western Mediterranean, where one survivor was rescued by a fishing boat after being stranded for more than 24 hours at sea.

"We cannot turn a blind eye to the high numbers of people dying on Europe's doorstep," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

Italy has trained and equipped the Libyan coast guard so it can intercept and rescue more migrant boats closer to their shores. But UN refugee officials and rights advocates say the migrants rescued by the Libyans are returned to dangerous, overcrowded detention facilities, where detainees face insufficient rations, rape, beatings and torture.

Libyan navy official Ayoub Gassim said Saturday the Libyan navy had stopped two smuggling boats, one with 67 migrants aboard and the other with 20.

In a separate operation, the German rescue group Sea-Watch said it rescued 47 people from a rubber boat off the coast of Libya.

After Italy's populist government took power in June 2018, the number of migrants reaching Italy after rescue at sea dropped off sharply, as anti-migrant Interior Minister Matteo Salvini refused to let humanitarian rescue vessels enter Italian ports.

Salvini says Italy has received hundreds of thousands of migrants rescued from Libyan-based smugglers in unseaworthy boats in the last few years and demands that other European Union countries do their part.

After the latest sea tragedy, Salvini said when humanitarian rescue boats patrol off Libya, "the smugglers resume their dirty trafficking (and) people start dying again."

U.S. ... (Continued From Page 2)

of an operational reserve in theater for responses to major events.

Highlights of the study, the report added, include validations of criticisms made at the time the war was being fought, and others that were not foreseen and only understood in the years that followed.

Study authors further noted that technology could not always make up for manpower shortages, that coalition warfare was "largely unsuccessful" for several reasons, that failing to account for a lack of understanding of the inner workings of Iraqi politics and group struggles meant some military unit actions did exacerbate problems.

In early 2003, the U.S., backed by the UK, invaded Iraq under the pretext that the regime of Saddam possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD). No such weapons, however, were ever found in Iraq.

More than one million Iraqis were killed as a result of the invasion, and the subsequent occupation of the country, according to the California-based investigative organization Project Censored.

Iran ... (Continued From Page 2)

Iran has twice fired missiles at targets outside the country, hitting Daesh installations in Syria as well as separatist terrorists in northern Iraq after getting permissions from the governments of the two countries.

The Zionist regime is believed to be supporting both terrorist groups. Danon, however, accused Iran of threatening "the stability of our region, Europe and beyond".

"I call on the Security Council to join the nations and unions of states that have already taken measures to curb the threat of Iranian missiles, especially those capable of carrying nuclear weapons," he said.

Iran does not possess a missile capable of carrying nuclear weapons. Moreover, the International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly confirmed the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program.

The Zionist regime, however, is the sole regime in the Middle East with an arsenal of nuclear warheads and a constant threat to regional peace and stability.

President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that Iran will be ready for a new satellite launch in a few months' time after a launching rocket sending a satellite, named Payam, into orbit did not reach adequate speed in its third stage.

Rouhani said Iran had achieved great success in building satellites and launching them, which "means we are on the right track".

"The remaining problems are minor, will be resolved in a few months, and we will soon be ready for a new launch," he said.

## Hamas Says U.S. Aid Cut to Palestinians 'Political Blackmail'

GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) – The Hamas resistance movement has condemned the U.S. decision to cut humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people as "political blackmail," urging international efforts to end Washington's anti-Palestine pressure campaign and pro-Tel Aviv bias.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said in a statement that the decision by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump to stop aid to the Palestinians "is in line with the 'deal of the century' that is aimed to liquidate the Palestinian issue."

He was referring to Washington's yet-to-be unveiled proposal aimed at resolving the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinians have already rejected Trump's plan, which is said to be hugely biased towards

the Zionist regime.

The statement came days after the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) said it would end all its projects in the occupied West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip on January 31 following the U.S. administration's decision to cut funding to the Palestinians.

"The Trump administration's decision to cut humanitarian aid provided to the Palestinian people is political blackmail reflecting the US immoral demeanor towards the Palestinians and their just cause," Barhoum said.

He also urged international institutions to stand by the Palestinians and support them in the face of "the discriminatory behavior of the US administration that is biased" in favor of the regime's occupation.

"Hamas calls on all international, humanitarian, and legal organizations to condemn the U.S. policies aimed at pressuring the Palestinian people to accept its schemes in the region. Such organizations should shoulder the responsibility of mobilizing support for and siding with the impoverished Palestinians," he added.

Analysts said the aid cut is meant to eliminate the Palestinians' demand for the right to return, warning that it would cause more hardship for those living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

On Thursday, Dave Harden, former USAID mission director and managing director of the Georgetown Strategy Group, said the US administration's decision to cut aid to Palestinians "demonstrates

again a lack of nuance, sophistication, and appreciation for the complexity of the situation."

USAID has been operating in the Palestinian territories since 1994, investing in infrastructure, medical services, and education.

Last year, the Trump administration ended all funding for UNRWA, the United Nations agency that provides humanitarian aid to over 5 million Palestinian refugees.

The controversial move came after President Mahmoud Abbas said the Palestinian Authority (PA) would no longer recognize Washington as a mediator of Israeli-Palestinian talks amid anger over Trump's decision in late 2017 to recognize occupied al-Quds as the Zionist regime's "capital" in defiance of international objections.

## Taliban Attack in Afghanistan's Logar Kills Eight Security Forces

KABUL (Dispatches) – A Taliban car bomb targeted a convoy of vehicles carrying the provincial governor of Logar in Afghanistan and the head of the region's intelligence agency on Sunday.

At least eight Afghan security forces were killed and 10 others were wounded. The top officials were not injured.

The explosives-packed car detonated on the main highway between Logar and Kabul, said Shahpoor Ahmadzai, the spokesman for Logar's provincial police.

Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban, said in a statement that the group was responsible for the blast and that a "large number" of Afghan special forces had been killed or wounded.

The Taliban regularly inflates the number and type of casualties that result from their attacks.

Logar is around 74km south of the capital and is known as a strategic gateway to Kabul. It is known as a strategic gateway to Kabul and is vulnerable to attacks due to the Taliban's active presence there.

The Taliban's five-year rule over at least three quarters of Afghanistan came to an end in the wake of a U.S.-led invasion in 2001, but 17 years on, the militant group continues to challenge the government and thousands of foreign troops remaining on Afghan soil.

The U.S. is currently pushing for a peace deal with the militants to spare its troops but negotiations remain deadlocked over the Taliban demand that American forces leave Afghanistan.

In recent months, Taliban militants have stepped up attacks on security forces across Afghanistan, killing a large number of police forces as well as civilians.

## Turkish U.S. Consulate Worker Faces Charges Over Gulen Links

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) – Turkish prosecutors have prepared the charge sheet against a local employee of the U.S. consulate who was arrested over alleged links to the network of U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, Demiroren News Agency (DHA) reported.

Gulen is accused by Ankara of orchestrating a coup attempt in 2016, in which he denies all involvement.

Consulate worker Metin Topuz's arrest in October 2017 added to existing tensions between the United States and Turkey, and led to a months-long suspension of bilateral visa services.

Relations between the two NATO allies have been strained over U.S. support for Kurdish fighters in northern Syria, Turkey's plan to buy a Russian missile defense system, and the U.S. jailing of an executive at a Turkish state bank in an Iran sanctions-

busting case.

Topuz is in jail along with two other local consulate employees, as is a Turkish-U.S. national and former NASA scientist who faces terrorism charges. Washington wants all of them to be released.

Meanwhile, thousands of people took part in a rally in the main Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in southeastern Turkey to express solidarity with a detained lawmaker from a pro-Kurdish party who launched a hunger strike in November.

Leyla Guven, a member of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), is protesting against the prison conditions of Abdullah Ocalan, the head of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Guven, 55, launched a hunger strike on November 8 to pressure the Turkish government into allowing lawyers and family members to

visit Ocalan.

Waving flags of the HDP, the demonstrators on Saturday flashed victory signs in support of Guven, whose condition her party describes as "life threatening" as her hunger strike entered its 66th day.

"It is our duty to add our voices to that of Leyla's," HDP's co-president Pervin Buldan told the crowd.

Guven's action was supported by more than 150 prisoners across Turkey in a show of solidarity.

She was arrested in January 2018 for her opposition to Turkey's military operation against Syrian Kurdish militants of the People's Protection Units (YPG) that are considered by Ankara an offshoot of the PKK.

Ocalan has been serving a life sentence for treason in an island prison near Istanbul since his capture in 1999.