

# UN Experts: Soaring Demolitions of Palestinian Homes Must Stop

GENEVA (Dispatches) – United Nations rights experts called Monday on the world community to act to stop a dramatic surge in the Zionist regime’s “systematic and deliberate” demolition of Palestinian housing. In the month of January alone, Zionist regime authorities reportedly demolished 132 Palestinian structures across 38 communities in the occupied West Bank, including 34 residential structures, the three independent experts said in a statement.



A Palestinian boy waves a flag in the east Al-Quds neighborhood of Silwan, Feb. 10, 2023. )

The Special Rapporteurs for rights in the Palestinian Territory, the right to adequate housing and the rights of internally displaced people, said the demolitions marked a 135-percent increase compared to January 2022.

The figures are based on those of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

“The systematic demolition of Palestinian homes, erection of illegal Israeli settlements and systematic denial of building permits for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank amounts to ‘domicide,’” they said.

In late 2022, the Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, called for “domicide” — defined as the massive, arbitrary destruction of civilian housing in violent conflict — to be recognized as a crime under international law.

“Direct attacks on the Palestinian people’s homes, schools, livelihoods and water sources are nothing but Israel’s attempts to curtail the Palestinians’ right to self-determination and to threaten their very existence,” the experts said in Monday’s statement.

The experts, who are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, reiterated their concern over the situation in the occupied West Bank’s Masafer Yatta villages.

They warned that more than 1,100 Palestinian residents there remained at “imminent risk of forced eviction, arbitrary displacement and demolitions of their homes, livelihood, water and sanitation structures.”

Meanwhile, the Zionist regime’s far-right cabinet has decided to “legalize” nine settler outposts in the

occupied West Bank in sheer defiance of the outcry from the international community and Palestinians who want an end to the regime’s settlement projects.

Zionist prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s extremist cabinet announced the decision on Sunday, retroactively authorizing the outposts that had been already set up by Zionist settlers over the past years without the regime’s so-called approval.

The retroactive authorization of the outposts marks the first such step to be taken by the regime’s new cabinet, which took over in late December featuring a combination of hard-right and ultra-Orthodox parties.

The Israeli premier has described expansion of the regime’s settlements as his cabinet’s top priority in order to buy the extremist parties’ loyalty.

However, the international community, views the settlements -- hundreds of which have been built across the West Bank since the occupation of the territory in 1967 -- as illegal due to their construction on the occupied territories.

tions were considered more impressive because they occurred during a weekday and mainly in Al-Quds, a right-wing and religious stronghold.

Inside parliament, a regime-controlled committee voted on Monday to advance part of the proposed legislation, setting the stage for a debate on the floor of parliament in the coming days — the first step toward turning the plan into law at some point in the coming months.

The vote set off a fracas in the committee room after opposition lawmakers, one of them in tears, chanted against the decision, and some of them clambered over tables to confront the committee chair, Simcha Rothman, an extremist lawmaker.

The moves came hours after the new regime announced its first plans to expand settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, giving retroactive authorization to nine settlements that were built by groups of settlers without official approval.

## Quake...

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Soylu said rescue efforts had ended in seven parts of Kahramanmaraş, where authorities report that 30,000 tents have been set up, with tens of thousands of people sheltering in schools and sports halls.

Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay late on Sunday said 108,000 buildings were damaged across the quake-hit zone with 1.2 million people being housed in student accommodation and 400,000 people evacuated from the affected region. The economic cost of the disaster

could be as much as \$84.1 billion, Turkish employers’ association Turkonfed said in a report Monday.

In Syria, the toll has not changed for several days and is expected to rise. Nurse anesthetist Abdelbaset Khalil described tending to hundreds of patients, despite his own trauma.

“I was tending to people in the hospital while my wife and daughter were under the rubble,” Khalil told AFP in the city of Harim in the militant-held Idlib province on the border with Turkey.

The first day was “extremely trying and very hard,” he said. “It passed like 50 years.”

On Monday, the UN’s relief chief Martin Griffiths visited Aleppo, where more than 200,000 people have been left homeless by the earthquake, according to the WHO.

A 10-truck UN convoy has crossed from Turkey into north-west Syria via the only open border crossing to the region, carrying shelter kits, an AFP correspondent reported Sunday.

However, UN officials said more was needed for millions whose homes were destroyed.

“Our focus now is on helping the Syrian people,” said UN envoy Geir Pedersen in Damascus.

The head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said that Damascus had given the all-clear for aid convoys from government areas, but that the WHO was still waiting for a green light from rebel-held areas before going in.

“The compounding crises of conflict, Covid, cholera, economic decline and now the earthquake have taken an unbearable toll,” Tedros said.

## Quake Stalls Election Campaign of Turkey’s Splintered Opposition

ISTANBUL (AFP) – Turkey’s splintered political opposition was supposed to agree Monday on a joint candidate to challenge Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s 20-year grip on power at the ballot box.

But a catastrophic earthquake, which has killed more than 35,000 people in Turkey and Syria, has postponed the meeting and thrown the timing of May elections into doubt.

Ruling and opposition party sources now feverishly speculate that Erdogan will delay the May 14 presidential and parliamentary polls in the wake of Turkey’s worst disaster of modern times.

“This is going to change things -- not just for the government,

but also for the opposition,” said Berk Esen, an assistant professor of political science at Istanbul’s Sabanci University.

The earthquake, and indeed any delay to the vote, could transform the political landscape, presenting both Erdogan -- who was first elected president in 2003 -- and his rivals with new opportunities and risks, experts say.

Unable to agree on a candidate for more than a year, Erdogan’s opponents now have more time to come to a consensus with Monday’s meeting postponed indefinitely.

They must use that time wisely, analysts say, trying to tap into public anger over the monumen-

tal scale of the destruction without appearing to seek political gain from the tragedy.

“The horrific events have handed the political opposition new ammunition against the government -- ammunition propelled by public anger and grievance,” said Anthony Skinner, a political risk consultant.

Erdogan has not uttered a word about elections since the earthquake, but appears on television multiple times a day, hugging survivors and consoling the nation.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, a bookish former civil servant with tepid national support who heads Turkey’s main secular party, has long been seen as the frontrunner in

the bid to end Erdogan’s rule.

But Meral Aksener of the nationalist Iyi Party has resisted Kilicdaroglu, appearing to back instead Istanbul’s popular opposition mayor Ekrem Imamoglu.

“The opposition was already in a very delicate position” as divisions were rife, Esen said.

Esen said Kilicdaroglu is now more likely to become the opposition candidate because “it’s going to be very difficult” for someone else to campaign openly at the time of national grief.

Experts believe a May vote is out of the question but that it could take place in June, the latest date by which elections must happen according to the constitution.

## Conflicts With Daesh in Iraq, Syria Leave Casualties

BAGHDAD (Xinhua) – Seven Daesh terrorists were killed on Sunday in airstrikes in a mountainous area in Iraq’s eastern province of Diyala, the Iraqi military said.

Acting on intelligence reports, Iraqi F-16 fighter jets carried out two airstrikes on Daesh hideouts in Himreen mountain range in the northern part of Diyala province, leaving seven Daesh terrorists killed, spokesman of the commander-in-chief of the Iraqi forces Yahia Rasoul said in a statement.

Rasoul said that the leader of the terrorists group in Diyala province was among those killed in the airstrikes.

The security situation in Iraq has been improving since the defeat of the Daesh in 2017. However, Daesh terrorists have since melted into urban centers, deserts, and rugged areas, carrying out frequent attacks against security forces and civilians.

Also on Sunday, on the other side of the border in Syria, Daesh ter-

rorists killed 11 of the 75 people it kidnapped on Saturday in eastern Syria, a war monitor reported.

A woman and a member of the Syrian government forces were among the victims, said the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The 75 workers were kidnapped by Daesh near Palmyra city on Saturday while they were collecting truffles, according to the observatory. The fate of 64 others kidnapped remains unknown, the Britain-based watchdog noted.

The observatory said the Daesh terrorists took advantage of the world’s preoccupation with the devastating earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria and killed the victims.

Daesh terrorists took the desert region in eastern Syria as a safe haven after suffering heavy losses in 2018, and frequently attack and abduct civilians and military personnel in the region.

## President ...

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in March showing Iran exported \$12.6 billion worth of goods to China and imported \$12.7 billion.

China also continues to buy oil from Iran despite U.S. sanctions. A number of companies that track data have said Iran’s oil exports hit new highs in the last two months of 2022 and had a strong start to 2023.

Along with Russia, China has also signaled it supports Iran’s bid to join the powerful BRICS group

of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

China is a signatory of Iran’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers that also includes Russia, the U.S., the United Kingdom, France and Germany -- which Washington unilaterally abandoned in 2018.

The Iranian president is also accompanied by Ali Bagheri Kani, the country’s top nuclear negotiator, who has been holding talks with the West aimed at restoring the accord. The talks, which began in early 2021, however, remain deadlocked.

## About...

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territories. Israeli media reported that some protesters had traveled in a 2.5-mile long convoy of cars from northern regions.

In their comments, speeches and banners, the protesters expressed fears that the judicial proposals would turn the occupying regime of Israel into a dictatorship.

“You voted Bibi,” read one protester’s placard, using a nickname for Netanyahu. “You got Mussolini.”

Gili Bar-Hillel, a publisher and translator, drove from Tel Aviv to participate, and described the judicial overhaul as “a regime coup.”

“I can’t stand and watch and say I didn’t do anything,” said Ms. Bar-Hillel, 48. “We are not far from a situation where we won’t be allowed to protest,” she added. “It’s a slippery slope.”

The protest followed weeks of regular demonstrations in Tel Aviv, where a similar number of people have gathered every Saturday night since the start of the year. But Monday’s demonstra-

## Old Friends...

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The Islamic Republic seeks maximum interaction with all countries in the world, especially friendly powers like China. Beijing has always shown how a country can progress and help the development of others without colonialism, which is characteristic of the Western powers. This approach is respected by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the People’s Republic of China have always been good and developing. The alignment of the two countries in the new state of the international order can lead to the strengthening of these relations. I would like to emphasize that the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to strengthen bilateral relations regardless of regional and international developments.

We consider China’s economic growth and foreign investment to benefit the people of this country and other nations, and we welcome China’s initiatives to promote peace, security, and development in the world. We hope that this positive trend will continue with the management of the far-sighted President of China to achieve lofty goals in the outlook of the coming years.

We believe that, along with political cooperation and respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, Iran and China will be good strategic complementing parties to each other in the path of economic growth and can provide each other valuable mutual services on the path to development. Political independence, security-building power, educated manpower, low cost of production, energy reserves, transit location, and industrial infrastructure are only parts of Iran’s capacities that can lead to the strengthening of the strategic partnership between Iran and China.

The Islamic Republic of Iran appreciates China’s role in overcoming the COVID crisis, Iran’s membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and joining BRICS Plus, and it is ready to strengthen bilateral relations with China, especially in the field of industrial production and advanced technologies under the 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership program.

The priority of my government’s foreign policy is neighborhood policy, and in this regard, I have extended a hand of friendship to all neighbors and I hope regional integration will be achieved through collective efforts. His Excellency Mr. Xi, with the Belt-Road Initiative, has also introduced new paths for collective development and maximum participation of countries to achieve common human destiny. Islamic Republic of Iran considers the Belt-Road Initiative not only as an international corridor but also as a platform for developing and creating a civilizational and industrial transformation along this path.

The nation of Iran is celebrating the 44th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution at the same time as this note is published. The Islamic Revolution took place to liberate the Iranian nation from thousands of years of tyrannical governments dependent on the global dominating powers. The Iranian nation has paid a price to stand on its own feet. Iran does not have an independence day because it has never been a colony. The reason for the hostility of the domineering powers is that the Iranian nation has decided to shape its own destiny and has been successful in this direction.

During these years, the Iranian nation has experienced progress and resistance at the same time. The Islamic Republic of Iran has achieved significant progress in various fields, including science and technology. Today, Iran is a leading country in sciences such as stem cells, space industries, biotechnology and nanotechnology, nuclear sciences and many modern sciences. Iran is the land of knowledge and art. Thanks to the talent of young people and the efforts of scientists, Iran ranks fifteenth in the world in science production. In space technology, Iran is in the limited club of the world’s space powers by designing and launching satellites based on its indigenous technology. In the realization of all these developments, Iranian women have always been pioneers and have played a significant role in the development of Iran. These achievements and huge scientific capacity can be the basis of extensive cooperation between the two nations of Iran and China in advanced sciences.

The culture of friendship and chivalry in Iran is as old as its civilization. Iran and China are friends in difficult situations: “Friends are many in feasts and laughter, but few in hardships”. The bonds of friendship between the two nations, relying on the common will, create many opportunities for deepening strategic mutual trust and a bright future for the relations between the two countries.

\*The writer is the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The article was first published in China’s People’s Daily newspaper.