

Illegal,  
unjust and  
a barrier to  
peace:

# Understanding Israel's illegal settlements



Israeli settlements often feature prominently in news items on the Middle East. This factsheet explains what settlements are, why they are harmful and how you can help to stop them.

## What are Israeli settlements and why are they a problem?

Israeli settlements are villages, towns and cities built illegally on Palestinian land. In order to build settlements, Palestinians are forced off their land and their homes are often demolished. In their place, Israel continues to build new neighbourhoods in which Palestinians are not allowed to live and has created a separate road system that Palestinians are not allowed to use. Palestinians and Israelis live under separate legal systems, with Palestinians subject to military, rather than civilian law.

Settlements are one of the clearest examples of Israel's unwillingness to abide by international law. Also, by preventing the creation of a Palestinian state, they help delay any possibility of a just peace in Palestine.

## How many settlements are there?

Today there are approximately 125 Israeli settlements in the West Bank and twelve neighbourhoods in Jerusalem. There are also a further 100 "settlement outposts" – these are smaller



*Illegal Israeli settlement construction in the occupied West Bank continues apace*

groupings of houses set up by the most extremist Israeli settlers in order to occupy further areas of Palestinian land. Altogether there are some 547,000 Israeli settlers of whom 196,890 live in settlements in Palestinian East Jerusalem and an additional 350,010 spread throughout the West Bank.<sup>1</sup>

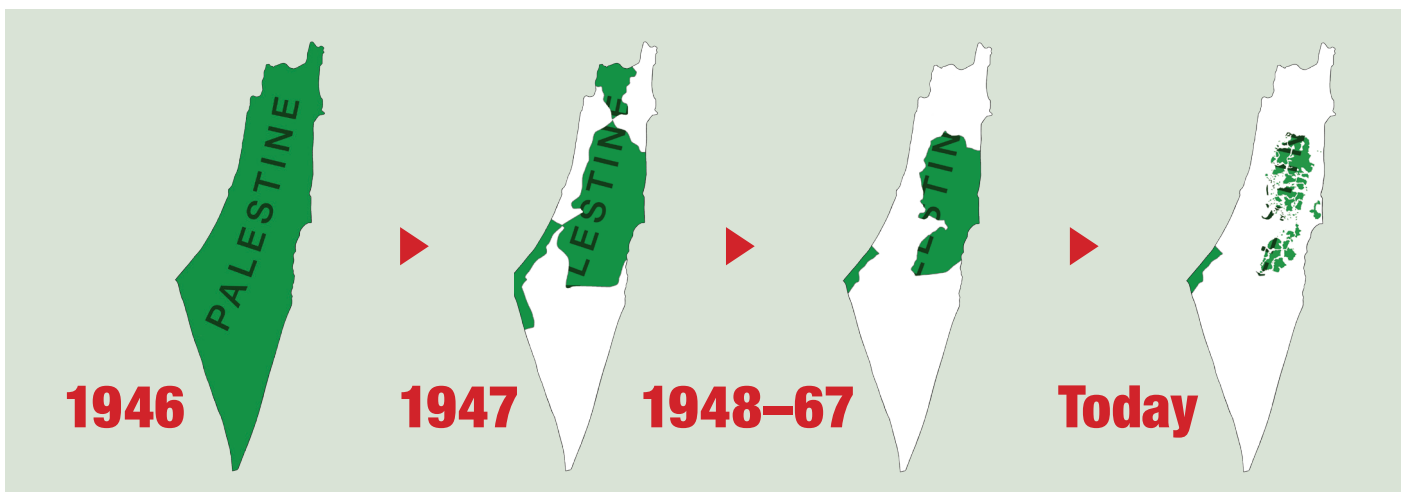
Israel began building settlements in 1967 when it started to occupy the areas of Palestine known as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Settlements began as small groups of houses built on hills overlooking Palestinian villages. Since then, Israel has dedicated significant resources to expanding settlements into the sprawling towns and cities they are today. Every Israeli government has participated in the policy of expanding settlements.

## What are the consequences of Israeli settlements?

Although the building of Israeli homes and communities sounds innocuous, in reality, their construction causes great suffering to Palestinians. Settlements are one part of a broader system of military occupation and colonial rule. Israel's military occupation is colonial because it denies Palestinians the right to rule themselves democratically and to collectively determine their future. The settlements, and the military occupation that supports and facilitates their growth, are illegal, a barrier to peace and have a profound negative impact on the daily life of Palestinians.

### Violence and ethnic cleansing

Settlement construction requires land on which to build these villages, towns and cities which are exclusively for Israelis. To get this land, Israeli soldiers and settlers engage in violence against Palestinians in order to encourage them to leave their homes. The rate of home demolitions has significantly increased in 2016, with 726 Palestinian structures demolished by Israel in the first 7 months of the year, a number which has well surpassed the figures for the whole of 2015<sup>2</sup>. There are frequent physical attacks by Israeli settlers and soldiers on Palestinians of all ages, often resulting in serious injury and death. Roadblocks are set up, windows smashed, crops destroyed and houses, cars and mosques are burnt. Between January and April 2016, 63 Palestinians, including 19 children, were killed and 1,710 Palestinians were injured throughout occupied Palestine<sup>3</sup>. This is typical of the scale of violence faced by Palestinians.



### Israel's Separation Wall and the infrastructure of Occupation

To ensure that Palestinians are excluded from settlements, and to maintain Israeli control, Israel does its best to separate Palestinians from Israelis. This includes physical barriers, such as the wall – Israel's 25ft<sup>4</sup> high concrete barrier which runs through the West Bank – as well as checkpoints, roadblocks and a segregated road system. This makes it impossible for Palestinians to live a normal life as they cannot freely travel from one town to the next. Israel also practices legal segregation by applying different laws to Israelis and Palestinians. Israel's practice of separating one racial group from another for the purpose of domination constitutes the crime of Apartheid under international law.

### Barrier to a just peace

Settlement construction is particularly focused on areas that Israel wants to permanently acquire and where they believe settlements can prevent Palestinians from establishing a viable state. Moving thousands of Israelis deep into occupied Palestinian land is an attempt by Israel to claim areas of Palestinian land and, eventually, to expand its borders by annexing these settlement areas. Settlements are a barrier to peace, therefore, because they make it impossible for Palestinians to establish their own state.

### Illegal

According to international law, Israel's occupation and settlement construction is illegal. Under the Geneva Convention – a key tenet of international law – it is considered illegal for an occupying country to “**deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.**” To do so is considered a war crime. The illegality of Israel's occupation and settlement construction has been reaffirmed by numerous UN resolutions, the International Committee for the Red Cross and a 2004 International Court of Justice ruling.

### What is the UK's position?

Whilst the UK Government recognises Israeli settlements to be “illegal and a barrier to peace”, the UK continues to provide substantial support to settlements. Much of the Israeli agricultural produce sold in the UK is grown in illegal Israeli settlements and benefits from preferential trade agreements with the UK. Meanwhile, companies and charities registered in the UK do business in settlements, sending money in support of projects that expand and entrench Israeli domination.

It is time to bring the UK's policy in line with its objectives. A number of prominent organisations have called on the UK Government to implement a ban on settlement produce and take measures to end the UK's complicity with settlements. You can contribute to the campaign to end UK complicity by visiting our website and taking action below.

### What you can do: Take action now!

- Join PSC and get active in your local branch
- Learn more through the PSC's settlement campaign page: [www.palestinecampaign.org/settlementcampaign](http://www.palestinecampaign.org/settlementcampaign)
- Arrange a meeting with your MP to discuss this issue. Resources to help with this can be found on the PSC website
- Sign and share our petitions on the PSC website and on social media

Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Web: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org)

Facebook: [palestinesolidarityuk](https://www.facebook.com/palestinesolidarityuk)

Twitter: [PSCupdates](https://twitter.com/PSCupdates)

Email: [info@palestinecampaign.org](mailto:info@palestinecampaign.org)



<sup>1</sup> [www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics](http://www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics)

<sup>2</sup> [www.ochaopt.org/content/protection-civilians-weekly-report-2-8-august-2016](http://www.ochaopt.org/content/protection-civilians-weekly-report-2-8-august-2016)

<sup>3</sup> [www.ochaopt.org/content/2015-overview-life-liberty-security](http://www.ochaopt.org/content/2015-overview-life-liberty-security)

<sup>4</sup> Maximum current height: <https://electronicintifada.net/content/it-fence-it-wall-no-its-separation-barrier/4715>