
UNRWA Commissioner-General pays supporting visit to refugees of West Bank Area C

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West Bank

UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi visited last week Palestine refugees, predominantly Bedouin communities, around Jerusalem and Jericho.

The communities visited by the Commissioner-General are all located in Area C, which comprises 60 per cent of the West Bank and is under full Israeli military and administrative control. Demolitions, evictions and property confiscation have displaced members of the Bedouin traditionally pastoralist population since 1967, while subjecting others to the threat of displacement.

Filippo Grandi's visit came as Israeli authorities announced plans to spearhead settlement expansion in the E1 area in the Jerusalem periphery. If the potential transfer plan is implemented, it would displace 2300 Bedouin living in the East Jerusalem periphery, most of whom are Palestine refugees, and move them to sites in Abu Dis, Nweima and other areas. The potential transfer of Bedouins residing in Area C within the Jerusalem periphery raises serious legal concerns that its implementation would amount to forcible transfer and forced evictions contrary to Israel's obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.

Accompanied by UNRWA's Director of Operations in the West Bank, Felipe Sanchez, Filippo Grandi's first stop was Wadi Abu Hindi, a Bedouin community of 400 people. The village is not connected to a water system or electricity and over half of its residents are refugees. Community leader Abu Yousef told Filippo Grandi that the Israeli authorities prevent the community from developing any basic infrastructure, such as school facilities. Thanking UNRWA for its assistance to the community, Abu Yousef stressed the need for greater protection of Palestinians living in Area C.

The Commissioner-General also visited the Palestine refugee communities of Ein ad Dyuk al Fauqa Bedouin and Nuwei'ma al Fauqa Bedouin, one of the proposed locations for the potential transfer plan. These communities originally come from Ein Gedi near the Dead Sea before being displaced first in 1948, and subsequently in the 1970s. "Since then, our situation has deteriorated," said Abu Ismail, the head of the community. "The land offered for grazing is not enough for us to maintain our livelihoods", he stated.

Commenting on his tour, Filippo Grandi said that "the question of Palestine refugees remains one of the unresolved issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and my visit proved again that it is not an abstract, political problem, but a situation with very concrete consequences on real people's lives. Day in, day out, insecurity and uncertainty pervade the communities I saw during this visit. Like so many other Palestine refugees being constantly caught in conflict and faced with new hardship, the Bedouin in this area are doing all they can to protect their community and avoid further injustice being perpetrated. UNRWA is committed to continuously providing support to these communities in need".