

## Today they destroyed Khirbet Tana



Khirbet Tana is a small shepherding village, with about 250 people, south east of Nablus, in Area C.\* The people are shepherds and farmers, their sheep are their main livelihood. Like many farming communities they bring their sheep out to graze in the mountains in a landscape that is breathtaking. Some have temporary homes here and some live here permanently.

The road used by the IDF to bring in the bulldozers

In 1985 the village was threatened with demolition and the Israeli Supreme Court stopped this but in 2005 the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) returned and demolished homes. The villagers have suffered four, and in some cases five, demolitions and now live in plastic shacks and the nearby caves. In 2008, the community, with the help of Rabbis for Human Rights, lodged a petition with the Israeli High Court of Justice, asking for an adequate planning scheme for the village that would allow them to have building permits. This was refused and again the villagers started receiving demolition orders. In 2010, homes and animal shelters were demolished twice; the last time being on December 13<sup>th</sup>, after which we visited twice to talk to the families. The IDF have declared the village a 'Closed Military Area' \*\* and are determined that these families, who have lived here for hundreds of years, will be harassed enough to leave.



In December 2010 even the tent school, which had stood next to the Mosque was demolished. All that could be seen in the rubble were the tiny upturned tables and chairs. The children are even denied education in their home village.

**The IDF destroyed most of the village again this morning**, including things that had been recently rebuilt to give shelter to both families and their sheep. We were called out because the Israeli army had started demolitions and were told that at 9.30am two bulldozers and fifteen IDF jeeps, each with at least four soldiers, arrived in the village and started to destroy everything on one side of the village. Some families were allowed to remove their belongings from their homes, which were plastic shacks, and sheep and lambs from their 'barracks' (plastic tents, some of which were supplied by the Red Cross after

the last demolitions). Others, despite pleading to be allowed to do this, were refused and their belongings were buried under the rubble and some sheep and lambs were injured or killed.

When we arrived there were heaps of belongings beside some of the piles of rubble and during the afternoon people were constantly carrying the belongings that had been saved and were either loading them onto a truck to take to the nearby caves or were carrying them into the shelter of a make shift plastic tent. Some young relatives and friends came out from Beit Furik to help and support. Small children wandered round, bemused.

Where there were very young children the parents had been told by the soldiers to take them away so they would not see the demolition!



In one case, when the shepherd asked to be allowed to remove the animals from their shelter, the bulldozer driver was even more destructive.

In two cases stone walls were broken and attempts were made to destroy the low walls of what used to be homes. Deep bulldozer tracks could be clearly seen in each place.

The one side of the village was completely destroyed and it seems that this was where some of the sheep shelters were made of corrugated iron sheets or had these sheets as roofs. This seemingly puts them in the category of 'permanent structures'. We were told that 11 families and about 100 people were affected, with 40 of these being under 15 years old. We were able to gather information from ten of the families before it

got too dark to see anything.

Rathi Mahmoud Hanani stood weeping in front of what had been his home. He was born here and his parents lived here before him. He said: "They came for me first and I told them to wait. I wanted to take my sheep and the twin lambs out. I wanted to take my things out of the tent but they would not let me. I said, please let me take my stuff, I have sheep. Then they hit the sheep with the bulldozer. Where will I keep my sheep? We only live here with our sheep. What have we done to them?"



This elderly man was distraught. After the last demolition, in December 2010, he showed us what had happened: his stone house totally destroyed and his belongings buried under the rubble. Despite all this he laughed with us and told us about his life here and in the Jordanian army when his new wife and his parents had given him up for dead. This time he was broken. Nothing was left of his home or sheep shelter (that had been supplied by the Red Cross) He was alone because his wife is very ill and staying in

the nearby village of Beit Furik. His concern was for his sheep and their new lambs that had no shelter on what would be a very cold night.



In this family in the picture on the left, 21 people, including young children, were forcibly displaced by the demolition. The extended family, Wasif and Uda Hanani, their two sons and their families lived in three tents and had sheep shelters for their flocks. They told us that a lot of soldiers had come and that they had tried to hit their father. They were one of the three families that had an Israeli Court

Order (a copy of which we saw, with their names on) showing that a demolition order was under appeal, but were told by the IDF soldiers that, "those don't apply here."

(Photo left: Petter Hansied)

By the end of the day, what was left of their belongings was loaded onto the van and they went to stay in two nearby caves: one for them and one for their sheep. This is the fourth time they have had their homes demolished.



When we visited before they had shown us that all they had left after that demolition was the bright yellow plastic sheet that they kept the sheep feed bags dry. The father and one of his sons was living under that, in a very small space next to the sheep feed, with just two mattresses and a tiny gas camping stove to heat water. After this they had put up new tents for their families and sheep and now even those were gone.



Although this has been their land since Ottoman times, and they have papers to show this, the people were told by the soldiers that they would return every two months to destroy anything that was put up again.

"I told them this is my land and if you demolish today I will build it tomorrow. They (the soldiers) said, "You can go back to Beit Furik". We will build again and again. When the

soldiers came I was standing in the middle. They told me to go out and I would not. I told them I wanted to see how they worked! We are suffering here since 1968 - there is nothing more I can be afraid of. We are with God and we are not afraid."

We met Usra Ahmed and Fais Yusef Hanani as it was getting dark and cold. Usra said: "I am 66 years old and I was born here, where you can see the olive trees. He (my husband) is nearly 80 years old and he was born here (pointing to where we were sitting outside their cave home). We spend all our time with the sheep - how can we live without them? It is not possible."



We listened to their story and those of the other families, while sitting with them on whatever could be found, drinking the cups of tea and coffee that they insisted on making for us. Despite the appalling devastation, their generous and innate hospitality prevailed. We had to leave when it got too dark to see anyone any more. Fires were being lit to give some warmth but no shelters had arrived for either people or animals. These have now arrived but doubtless it will not be long before they suffer the same thing again.

**Please tell this story to others and write to your MP and MEP and ask why these farmers should suffer this constant devastation, be prevented from earning their living and denied safe shelter, education, and freedom from fear.**

Ann Farr - EAPPI Team 38 (UK) based in Yanoun

*\*Area C:* In 1995 the West Bank was divided into Areas A, B and C in the Oslo Agreement. Area A is under full Palestinian civil and security control. Area B is full Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian security control. Area C is full Israeli control over security, planning and construction. This agreement was intended to be for a few years until a permanent solution was found. This has not happened and the Palestinians living in Area C are being strangled by Settlements and Settler outposts and have total and absolute bans on building, extending or repairing anything on their land.

*\*\*Closed Military zone:* since 1967 the Israeli authorities have declared 18% of the West Bank as a "closed military zone" for training, or "firing zones". The Israeli Civil Administration prohibits construction in these areas and residents are routinely issued demolition and eviction orders. Source: UNOCHA Fact Sheet February 2011

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