For Immediate Release
5-2-2018

PM Hamdallah condemns Israel's demolition of Abu Nawwar school building and warns against increased attacks on Palestinian education

Ramallah-Office of the Prime Minister: Prime Minister Dr. Rami Hamdallah condemned today in the strongest possible terms the demolition of two classrooms in the Bedouin community of Abu Nawwar by Israeli forces. "Besides the fact that such a demolition contravenes international humanitarian law, this latest attack is directed against Palestinian schoolchildren, and is simply immoral. The right to education is universal and enshrined in several treaties, such as the Conventions of the Right of the Child, of which Israel is a signatory."

Earlier this morning, Israeli forces bulldozed the classrooms, which had been built with public European funds in October 2017. Prior to its construction, the community's children were forced to walk several kilometres to reach the closest school. Due to the long walk through the hills and crossing of dangerous highways, many of the community's children had dropped out in the past, and only a handful used to reach graduation, according to Abu Imad, the community's representative. Located in the so-called "Area C" of the West Bank, the community of Abu Nawwar has been prevented by the Israeli authorities from undertaking any construction, including roads that would allow a school bus to access the community and safely bring the children to and from school.

The community of Abu Nawwar has been increasingly targeted by Israeli demolitions. Last summer, the Israeli authorities confiscated solar panels used to power the community's kindergarten and school. Abu Nawwar is one of 46 Palestinian Bedouin herding communities (comprising approximately 8,000 residents, the majority of which are refugees) that the Israeli government is seeking to displace to one of three designated sites, in order to go forward with the "E1" plan, which entails the construction of thousands of additional settlement units in an area between East Jerusalem and the illegal settlement of Maaleh Adumim, where several Bedouin communities are currently located.

If implemented, the 'E1 plan' will not only physically isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, but would also create a contiguous series of illegal settlements stretching from East Jerusalem to the Jordanian border, dividing the West Bank into two parts and rendering the viability of a Palestinian state virtually impossible.

Today's demolition is the latest in an increase of Israeli attacks against Palestinian education and schools, despite the fact that schools and hospitals are considered "protected places" under international law. According to humanitarian actors, at least 61 schools in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are at risk of demolition by Israel and could suffer the same fate as Abu Nawwar's school. "Denying Palestinian children their right to education, not to mention other fundamental rights, is a deliberate policy of the Israeli authorities to pressure Palestinian communities to leave, in order to confiscate their land and build additional settlements," Dr. Hamdallah warned.

The majority of the schools under threat are located in the so-called “Area C” of the West Bank, under full Israeli control, where vulnerable Bedouin communities are under extreme pressure by the Israeli authorities. Dozens of Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley, Jerusalem periphery and south Hebron Hills, such as Susiya, Khan al Ahmar, or Abu Nawwar, are at risk of being completely demolished and their residents expelled, paving the way for Israel to confiscate their land for the purpose of building or expanding its illegal settlements. “Under international law, Palestinians living under military occupation have the status of ‘protected persons’ which prohibit the occupying power from undertaking actions that violate their inherent rights. The Israeli plans to ‘relocate’ several Palestinian communities amount to forced transfer, which is defined as a war crime under the Rome Statute,” concluded Dr. Hamdallah.