UN officials' statement on demolitions in Sur Bahir

Statement by Mr. Jamie McGoldrick (Humanitarian Coordinator), Ms. Gwyn Lewis (Director of West Bank Operations for UNRWA), and Mr. James Heenan (Head of the UN Human Rights Office in the occupied Palestinian territory)

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We are following with sadness today the Israeli authorities' destruction of homes in the Palestinian community of Sur Bahir. Initial information emerging from the community indicates that hundreds of Israeli forces entered the community this morning and have demolished a number of residential buildings, including inhabited homes, located in Areas A, B and C of the West Bank on the East Jerusalem side of the Barrier. The large-scale operation began in the early hours of this morning while it was still dark, forcing families out of their homes, and causing great distress among residents. Among those forcibly displaced or otherwise impacted are Palestine refugees, some of whom today are facing the reality of a second displacement in living memory.

Humanitarian partners are poised to provide emergency response to those displaced or otherwise affected by the destruction of their private property. But no amount of humanitarian assistance can replace a home or cover the massive financial losses sustained today by the owners. Several of the affected

people report having invested their life savings into the properties, after securing the required building permits from the Palestinian Authority. What happened today in Sur Bahir is of even greater significance, as many other homes and structures now risk the same fate.

Israel's policy of destroying Palestinian property is not compatible with its obligations under international humanitarian law. Among other things, the destruction of private property in occupied territory is only permissible where rendered absolutely necessary for military operations, which is not applicable. Furthermore, it results in forced evictions, and contributes to the risk of forcible transfer facing many Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

In 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), ruled against the legality of the construction of the Barrier and found that the parts of the Barrier that run inside the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as we see in Sur Bahir, cannot be justified by military exigencies and thus violates Israel's obligations under international law. Just over 15 years ago, to the day, the UN General Assembly, in Resolution ES-10/15, of 20 July 2004, demanded that Israel comply with its legal obligations as stated in the ICJ's advisory opinion.

Had there been concrete action to ensure respect for these principles, and for international humanitarian and human rights law, generally, the people of Sur Bahir would not be experiencing the trauma they are today, and violations of their rights.

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For background to the demolitions, see previous joint statement and the OCHA oPt article, Threat of Demolitions in East Jerusalem.

For detailed data on demolitions, see the West Bank Demolitions and Displacement data set.