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Israel escalates annexation efforts in Jerusalem and West Bank

As attempts to form a new Israeli government face a standstill, one thing remains constant in Israeli policy: **escalating the annexation and land grab in the occupied West Bank and pursuing an even greater control over East Jerusalem**. Through the implementation of military orders and the approval of major plans, Israel continues to disregard international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

October has been a particularly grim month as far as seizure and confiscation orders are concerned. The Israeli Civil Administration (ICA), accompanied by the occupation army, continues to distribute seizure warrants against Palestinian-owned lands.

In October alone, JLAC documented the distribution of 51 such warrants, covering nearly **6,850 dunams** from Sammou' and al-Dhahiriyah in the southern West Bank to Ya'abad, Tura, and Zabada in the Jenin governorate in the north.

After examining the military orders issued by the ICA, JLAC found that most seizure orders concern lands already confiscated in 2002-2006 for the purpose of constructing or extending the annexation and expansion wall. The confiscation was carried out through the issuance of temporary seizure orders that were renewed every three or five years. In these cases, the possibility of filing legal objections against the seizure orders has long expired due to the statute of limitations.

Some of the seizure orders have been amended to include additional swaths of land not included in the original orders. Among such orders is one pertaining to lands located in the Bethlehem governorate, where Israel is planning to build an industrial zone in the Gush Etzion settlement bloc and to pave roads that connect the different settlements of the bloc without having to pass through Road number 60. This initiative is led by interim Transportation Minister Betzalel Smotrich, a far-right nationalist.

The seizure orders also include lands in Hizma and Anata in the Jerusalem area confiscated for the purpose of establishing settler-only roads.

Israel uses the pretext of military necessity to justify both the original seizure orders and their amendment, renewal and expansion. For Palestinians, however, it is clear that the lands are confiscated for the purpose of escalating the annexation of Area C and expanding settlements and settlement roads.

Since the newly-amended orders cover lands that have not been included in the original orders, Palestinian farmers and shepherds are surprised to learn about the extension of the scope of the orders while working or grazing their lands. Following the issuance of the seizure orders, any area that lies within 150 meters of the seized lands is designated as a military zone, preventing



Palestinians from accessing it. In total, the lands that are effectively confiscated through seizure orders cover a much larger area than that officially announced.

The extensive appropriation of Palestinian lands through seizure or confiscation orders for the purpose of building or expanding settlements violates Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and Article 46 of the Hague Regulations.

The unlawful appropriation of property by an occupying power amounts to "pillage," which is prohibited by both The Hague Regulations and Fourth Geneva Convention and is a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Meanwhile in occupied East Jerusalem, the Israeli Ministerial Committee on Planning, Construction, Land and Housing, chaired by interim Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon, approved the construction of a cable car that would connect west Jerusalem with the Old City.

Hailed by its proponents as a tourism attraction and a solution to traffic congestion around the Old City with the capacity to ferry 3,000 settlers and tourists per hour, the cable car is essentially a settler-colonial project that seeks to solidify the Elad Foundation's grasp on Silwan and strengthen the control of the Israeli government and settler organizations over the Old City.

In addition to its dangerous political implications, the cable car would make the lives of Silwan residents unbearable due to the high levels of noise. It would irrevocably ruin the landscape and archaeological sites in the area and destroy the view of the Gehenna valley and the Old City walls. The committee's decision constitutes the final authorization required to proceed with the implementation of the plan.

The Old City and its Walls, upon which the planned cable car will wreak aesthetic havoc, is inscribed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger. As an occupying power, Israel does not possess the sovereignty to conduct long-lasting changes to the occupied territory whose purpose is to turn the occupation from temporary to permanent. By irreparably altering the characters of an occupied territory, the planned cable car constitutes a violation of the principle of the temporary nature of occupation. The changes and deprivation of Palestinian rights that such plan entails violate Articles 43 and 47 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The project also violates Article 1(a) of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

As such, any company that invests or participates in the implementation of the project will be partaking in the violation of customary international humanitarian law.

The approval of the cable car plan in East Jerusalem and the new confiscation orders in the West Bank are part of Israel's larger system of endless occupation, forcible displacement and dispossession. The failure of the international community to hold Israel accountable has emboldened these expansionist policies, granting Israel full impunity as it violates and negates Palestinian rights and existence.