

Two Thousand Olive Trees under Threat

April 2012

On April 25th 2012, nine Deir Istiya farmers received orders to uproot 1,400 trees by 1st May 2012. According to Nazmi Alsalman, Mayor of Deir Istiya at the time, this was the largest order for uprooting trees that the farmers of Wadi Qana had ever received (in 2011, approximately 1,400 trees were uprooted but not at the same time or under the same order). The threat increased on April 27th 2012 when another farmer received an order to uproot a further 600 trees. The orders, placed on retaining terraces, rocks and fences in the vicinity of the trees, stated that if the farmers did not uproot their trees they would face punishment which could include large fines and imprisonment.

On 30th April 2012, IWPS, partnering with international and Israeli activists, kept a 24-hour presence with the farmers in Wadi Qana, reasoning that a strong international showing would reduce the risk of the Israeli military carrying out the order.

IWPS has co-ordinated a petition asking the Israeli government to overturn the order and for international support to achieve this. The petition collected more than 8,000 signatures and was delivered to the office of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Ministry of Defence, the Israeli Ministry of the Environment, as well as the UK, US, Canadian, New Zealand and Australian Ambassadors to Israel.

IWPS has worked with al-Zaytouna to create awareness of the Wadi Qana crisis amongst partner organisations and the press and achieved support from, amongst others, the Fairtrade Foundation and the Palestine Monitor.

What next for Wadi Qana?

Legal action on behalf of the impacted farmers has been ongoing alongside the co-ordinated local, international and Israeli pressure on the Israeli Government. In June 2012, the order to uproot the trees in Wadi Qana was lifted by the Israeli Supreme Court but the threat remains imminent with opportunities for an appeal by the Israeli Government and subsequent reinstatement of the order.

The lifting of the order has not prevented threats to further trees. A Palestinian representative of al Zaytouna reported that "On the 28th of August 2012, the Israeli Officers arrived to Wadi Qana, Deir Istiya and they have left the written orders in the lands of three farmers informing them that: they have to 'evacuate' the lands (used the word evacuate instead of uprooting) from any planted olive tree, claiming that it is a Natural Reserve land, and the farmers have to do this

‘evacuation’ by the 15th of September 2012, otherwise the military will have to uproot the trees by force, and the farmers will have to pay the cost of the bulldozers work.”

What Can I Do to Help?

The global focus on Wadi Qana has been a key factor in preventing the orders being carried out. Circulating the story of Wadi Qana and the strong link between human rights and environmental abuses on the West Bank amongst your networks and social media outlets will maintain this pressure on the Israeli government. IWPS would be happy to support coverage and provide spokespeople and images for blogs and press.

Non violent intervention, such as the 30th April presence in Wadi Qana, and documenting human rights abuses is core to the work of IWPS. We are currently looking to recruit volunteers to join our small team of female human rights activists in the West Bank. If you would be interested in applying, please visit our volunteer page.

Today, Thursday 20th September 2012, IWPS volunteers were asked to meet a Deir Istiya farmer, AM, who had discovered an order left yesterday on his land to destroy the following:

- A new fence 200 metres long and 50 metres wide;
- 50 olive trees aged 8-10 years whose crop is almost ready to harvest;
- 15 citrus trees.

He was given a deadline of this coming Sunday, 23rd September 2012 under penalty of arrest, trial, and punishment by fine or imprisonment. On that day, instead of uprooting, AM will be joined in Wadi Qana by a group of Deir Istiya farmers, officials and internationals, including IWPS, to keep watch.

The order, which IWPS has in its possession, was issued on behalf of the Civil Administration of Samaria and Judea by the officer in charge of the Department for Natural Zones and National Parks. The order however violates certain basic procedures: e.g. it does not contain key information which should have been filled out, such as the name of the zone or the name of the farmer, and normally at least one week's notice is given. All of these factors make it legally invalid.

Please note that the order was left in the open air, without warning and could easily have gone missing. Also note that the order was left on the very day that a decision was expected from the Israeli High Court in a test case involving trees ordered for destruction in April this year, some of which are close by this land. Since this is now the third group of destruction orders, farmers with



land in Wadi Qana are being advised to go to their land as frequently as possible and to keep a watch for more orders.

This order follows 2 more groups of orders: on group of 10 orders in April, which is still the subject of High Court proceedings, and a second group of orders in August. AM has already assembled his legal documents by which he will appeal against this order.

Please will you activate your networks, asking people of influence in your communities to make representations to the Israeli authorities, particularly to the Minister of Defence, Ehud Barak, at ehudb@knesset.gov.il (as head of the Civil Administration in the West Bank) and the Israeli ambassador to your country.

AM expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all who make representations on his behalf.