

HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT No. 477

Land being stolen from Palestinian farmers for the expansion of the illegal settler colony of Bruchin

Date of incidents: 12 June 2013

Place: Bruqin, Salfit Governorate, Occupied West Bank, Palestine

Witnesses: Residents of Bruqin, local and international activists

It was only days after it had been placed that a farmer accidentally found a piece of paper that stated he was no longer the owner of his own land. The undated paper, in Hebrew and Arabic, had been hidden under a rock in the farmer's fields in the village of Bruqin, occupied Palestine. It said that the farmer's land was being taken for the expansion of the nearby illegal Israeli settler colony of Bruchin [also spelled as Brukhin].

This farmer was not the only one to be informed about a crime in such a way. More land owners, including the village's mayor, received the same notifications. Additionally, this week the Jerusalem Post published an announcement that more than 500 new houses would be built on land stolen from Bruqin and its neighbouring villages Sarta and Kafr-ad-Dik (the article itself made no mention of the villages, implying they don't exist).

The exact number of dunums of land being stolen is not clear. Villagers have been given 60 days to file official complaints with the occupation authorities. New houses may be built any time now.

The illegal settler colony of Bruchin started off as a military base in 1999. Not long after, the first houses were built on a hilltop; today, there are around 50 of them, with some still standing empty. According to residents of Palestinian villages, those and any newly built houses will be free for incoming illegal settlers.

This is one of the tricks the Israeli Apartheid state uses to increase the number of illegal settler colonisers in occupied Palestine: to provide them with free houses built on land stolen from its Palestinian owners.

All settler colonies in Palestine are illegal under international law. In 2012, the illegal settler colony of Bruchin was "legalised" as an "authorised settlement" by that same power that does not respect human rights nor international – or even its own – laws. The latest announced land theft in Bruqin, Sarta, and Kafr-ad-Dik is just another logical step in this crime.



Illegal settler colony of Bruchin in the background.

Bruqin is situated 13 km west of the city of Salfit; the industrial zone of the illegal settler colony Ariel can be seen from the village, as is Bruchin. In addition to land theft, constant military invasions, settler and wild pig attacks, the village is under severe stress from sewage and untreated wastewater that is released from the settlement and its factories. Pumped underground, chemical wastewater contaminates local water resources and causes immense damage to the natural environment; the settler sewage river that runs through the village is just one example of such behaviour. Residents say that cancer cases in Bruqin are much higher than Palestinian average; children in particular are suffering.

The location of Bruqin, Sarta, and Kafr-ad-Dik, as well as other neighbouring villages, is strategically important: the Salfit Governorate boasts some of the most productive water zones of the Western Aquifer, a key water resource in Palestine. They also fall in the way of the “Ariel finger”, the Zionist project that intends to annex Palestinian land by connecting the many illegal settler colonies in the area into one big entity. It would also cut the West Bank in two, putting even more pressure on the Palestinian people.

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