



## Palestinians in East Jerusalem: Before, During, and After COVID-19

### Summary for UK parliamentarians

Israel unilaterally annexed occupied East Jerusalem in 1967, illegally extending its laws and jurisdiction to the occupied territory, in contravention of the absolute prohibition on the acquisition of territory by force in international law. More than half a century later Israel threatens to illegally annex yet more of the occupied West Bank, with the terms of the coalition agreement that established the current Israeli government in April permitting the process to begin as early as 1 July.

Though the exact form this further annexation will take remains unknown, Palestinians in the West Bank have long endured the effects of years of creeping *de facto* annexation.<sup>1</sup> The case of East Jerusalem demonstrates how Israel has, through formal or *de jure* annexation over areas of occupied territory, entrenched its structural discrimination, institutionalised neglect and de-development of Palestinian communities and institutions, including healthcare. This situation has been perpetuated by inaction by the international community which, though near-unanimously holding steadfast in refusing to recognise Israeli sovereignty in East Jerusalem, has failed to end Israel's pervasive violations of Palestinians' fundamental human rights in the city or its flouting of numerous UN Security Council resolutions opposing its annexation.<sup>2</sup>

This briefing paper produced by *Medical Aid for Palestinians, Al Haq – Law in the Service of Man*, and the *Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center* outlines how the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has exposed enduring inequalities between Palestinians and Israeli settlers living illegally in annexed East Jerusalem. In particular, it describes how the systematic neglect and de-development of Palestinian communities and healthcare have resulted in a lack of testing facilities; inaccurate and unreliable data on COVID-19 transmission; harassment, arrests and persecution of Palestinian health volunteers; and the ill-preparedness of Palestinian hospitals to meet the needs of the population. These are further evidence of Israel's continuing violations against Palestinians' rights to health and the social and economic determinants of health – such as adequate housing, water, sanitation, work and education – and its chronic failure to meet its duties toward the occupied population of East Jerusalem under international humanitarian law.

The urgent need for greater international attention and action to address Israeli violations in East Jerusalem was brought into sharp relief in May, when Israeli police shot dead Eyad Hallaq, an unarmed 32-year-old Palestinian man with autism and a mild learning disability, in the Old City.<sup>3</sup> His death underscores how Israel's continued militarised presence makes East Jerusalem an often-deadly place for Palestinians, and shone a light on Israel's persistent failure to conduct genuine investigations into killings by its forces, or prosecute those perpetrating illegal killings.

This briefing makes recommendations to international community, including the UK, on how it should help to address this illegal and discriminatory situation and promote the right to health of Palestinians in East Jerusalem. The UK, with its historical, moral and legal obligations towards the Palestinian people, should:

<sup>1</sup> Al Haq, BADIL, CIHRS (June 2020) <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/16937.html>

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, UNSC Resolutions 242 (1967), 298 (1971), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016)

<sup>3</sup> MAP (June 2020) <https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1125-map-demands-accountability-for-killing-of-eyad-hallaq>



- Continue to uphold its responsibility under international law to recognise the illegality of Israeli annexation of occupied territory, not to aid or assist in maintaining this illegal situation, and cooperate to bring this illegal situation to an end;
- Actively oppose further annexation of occupied Palestinian territory, and clearly and publicly outline what meaningful consequences will result if Israel proceeds;
- Publicly re-state its support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including permanent sovereignty over natural resources, and the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homes, lands, and property;
- Expand its aid funding support for the Palestinian healthcare system, including both immediate support for East Jerusalem hospitals currently responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and long-term support for the sustainable development of Palestinian health infrastructure in the city;
- Press Israel to ensure all Palestinian patients from the occupied Palestinian territory, including Gaza, are permitted timely access to hospitals in East Jerusalem as per its obligations as the occupying power;
- Make urgent diplomatic representations to Israel urging it to uphold its obligations to respect, protect and fulfil Palestinians' rights to health and the social and economic determinants of health in East Jerusalem, including ending its discriminatory planning regime; house demolitions; arbitrary revocation of residency rights; denial of family unification; and systematic neglect of Palestinian communities; and
- Support genuine investigations into, and accountability for, Israel's violations of international law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including through international legal avenues, so as to help prevent future violations and provide justice to victims.

Parliamentarians can help protect the rights to health and dignity of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem by tabling parliamentary questions and writing to the Foreign Secretary to ask what the UK government is doing to enact these recommendations. The organisations authoring this paper would be happy to help provide additional briefings, information, and case studies directly from affected communities.