

Israel blocks EU diplomats from visiting Bedouin village



Tel Aviv, July 6 (RHC)-- European diplomats have been barred from paying a solidarity visit to a school in a Palestinian Bedouin village in the West Bank under threat of demolition by Israeli authorities. Diplomats from Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Switzerland sought to visit the school in the village of Khan al-Ahmar, which is located east of Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank.

But they were turned back by Israeli forces at the village entrance. Police at the scene said the area had been declared a closed military zone. "We were briefed by local leaders but refused access by security forces to the school," the Irish representative office to the West Bank wrote on its official Twitter feed.

The consul general of France in Jerusalem al-Quds, Pierre Cochard, also told journalists at the scene that demolishing the village of 173 residents would be a violation of the Geneva Convention laying out the obligations of an occupier toward those under its control. "We wanted to show our solidarity with this village which is threatened with destruction, for humanitarian reasons and because it is a major issue of international law," he added.

The Israeli Supreme Court authorized the demolition of the entire village in May. Israeli authorities hung notices around the village on Tuesday evening, warning the residents of their impending expulsion. They also issued orders authorizing the seizure of access roads to the village. Heavy equipment has since been seen there, feeding speculation a road was being prepared to facilitate its evacuation and

demolition.

It is not known when the demolition will take place, but on Thursday bulldozers could be seen widening the access road to the village. Activists expect the demolition to happen within the next few days.

Residents and activists climbed onto bulldozers and waved Palestinian flags in a bid to halt the demolition. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent, 11 people were arrested. Dozens of Palestinian were also wounded, four of whom were taken to a local hospital.

Khan al-Ahmar is located near several major Israeli settlements and close to a highway leading to the Dead Sea. Activists say continued Israeli settlement construction in the area could effectively divide the West Bank in two.

The expulsion of several dozen Bedouin families from Khan al-Ahmar is seen as a precursor to future expansion of the Israeli settlement of Kfar Adumim. The European Union and the United Nations have called on the Israeli regime to halt its plan to raze the village, saying such actions are contrary to international law and undermine peace efforts.

Israeli authorities have been carrying out forced evacuations against Bedouins since 1949. The demolition of Bedouin homes is part of the Israeli regime's massive land grab policy, which will forcefully displace thousands of people.

Tel Aviv has so far refused to recognize the rights of Palestinian Bedouins and denies them access to basic services.

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