Report says Israel demolishes record number of Palestinian homes in 2020
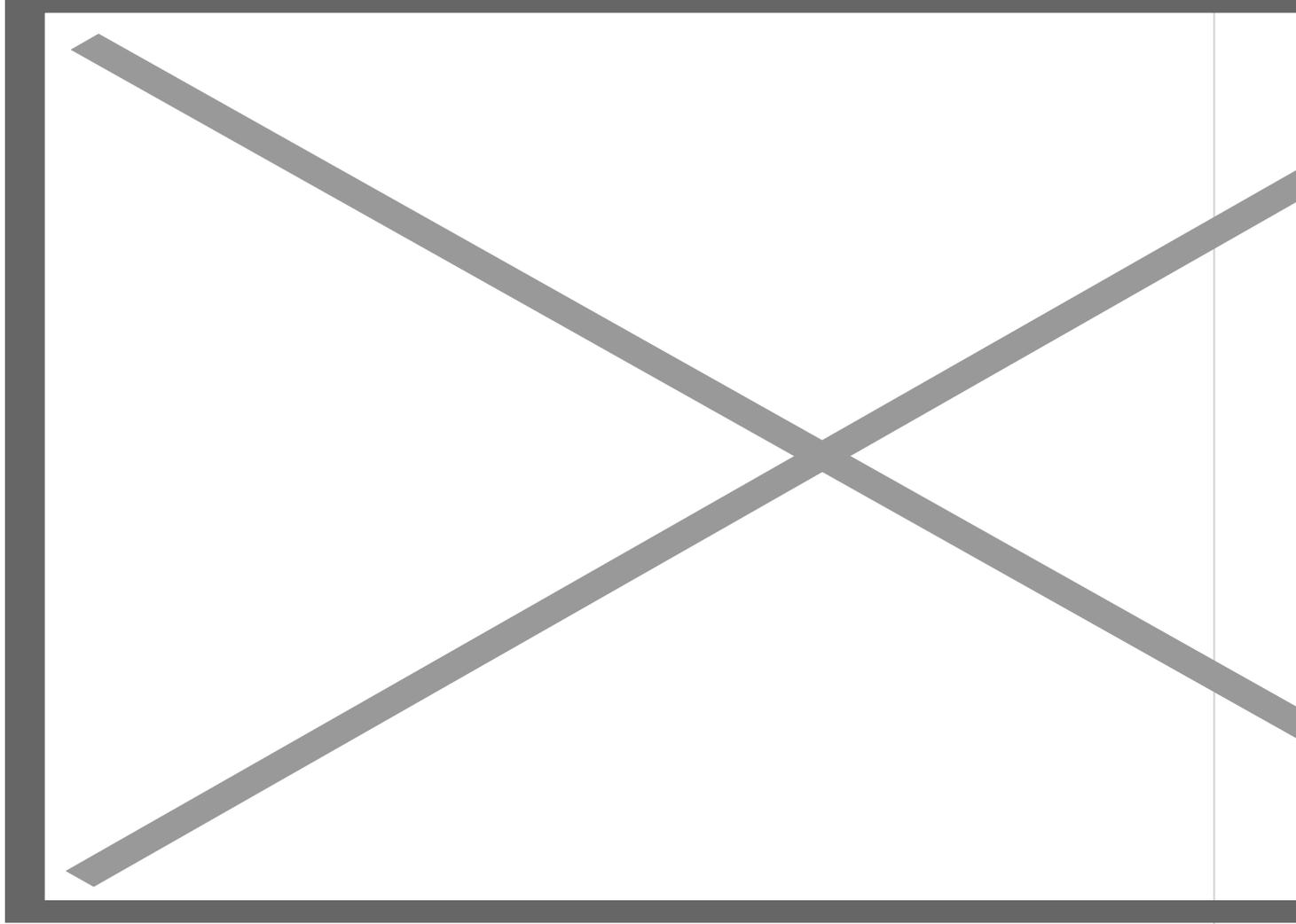

A Palestinian woman intervenes as Israeli forces remove personal belongings from a house before demolishing it, south of the occupied West Bank. (Photo: AFP)

Ramallah, November 1 (RHC)-- Israeli authorities have demolished a record number of Palestinian homes and structures in the occupied East Jerusalem al-Quds so far this year, despite the coronavirus pandemic that has seriously affected Palestinians' lives.

Ir Amim, an Israeli NGO opposing Israel's settlement expansion activities, said in a report that 2020 had surpassed previous years with a record total number of Israeli home demolitions in east Jerusalem al-Quds, the Palestinian Information Center reported on Sunday.

The Israeli authorities have knocked down at least 125 residential homes so far this year, compared to 104 for all of 2019 and 72 in 2018. "This week, Israeli authorities [carried out] several demolitions in east Jerusalem bringing the total number of housing units demolished since the beginning of the year to 125. Thus, with still two months left in the year, 2020 is the worst year in terms of demolition of housing units. Previously, 2016 was the year with the highest number of housing units demolished in East Jerusalem at 123."

"Along with the 125 housing units, 64 other units (shops, storerooms etc.) have also been demolished," the Israeli organization noted. According to its report, the number of razing has been too high in the mainly Palestinian eastern half of the city despite a two-month suspension during the coronavirus lockdown this spring.

"This record number of home demolitions was reached despite the fact that Israeli authorities froze demolitions for three months earlier during 2020. The freeze only happened after persistent demands from human rights organizations pointing to the significant risk that displaced families face during the COVID-19 crisis," Amim said.

"The freeze on demolitions took place during the two periods of lockdown in Israel: From March 24 to May 25 and from September 18 to October 18. Still, the record number of demolitions demonstrates that the Israeli authorities chose not to take the necessary steps in order to prevent families from losing their homes during the pandemic," the Israeli NGO added.

"The main reason for the spike in demolitions is the full enactment of Amendment 116 to the Planning and Building Law which resulted in an unprecedented number of 84 housing units (and 30 other units), out of the 125, being self-demolished by the families who owned them."

The Israeli forces routinely demolish Palestinian houses in the occupied West Bank, claiming that the structures have been built without permits, which are nearly impossible to obtain. They also sometimes order Palestinian owners to demolish their own houses or pay the costs of the demolition if they do not.

"Israel's long term policy of refusing to initiate or approve new detailed outline plans for Palestinian neighborhoods in east Jerusalem lies at the root of unpermitted construction. Last year, for example, out of over 21,000 housing units advanced in detailed outline plans in Jerusalem less than 8 percent were for Palestinian neighborhoods of the city (Palestinians comprise 38 percent of Jerusalem's population)," Amim said.

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