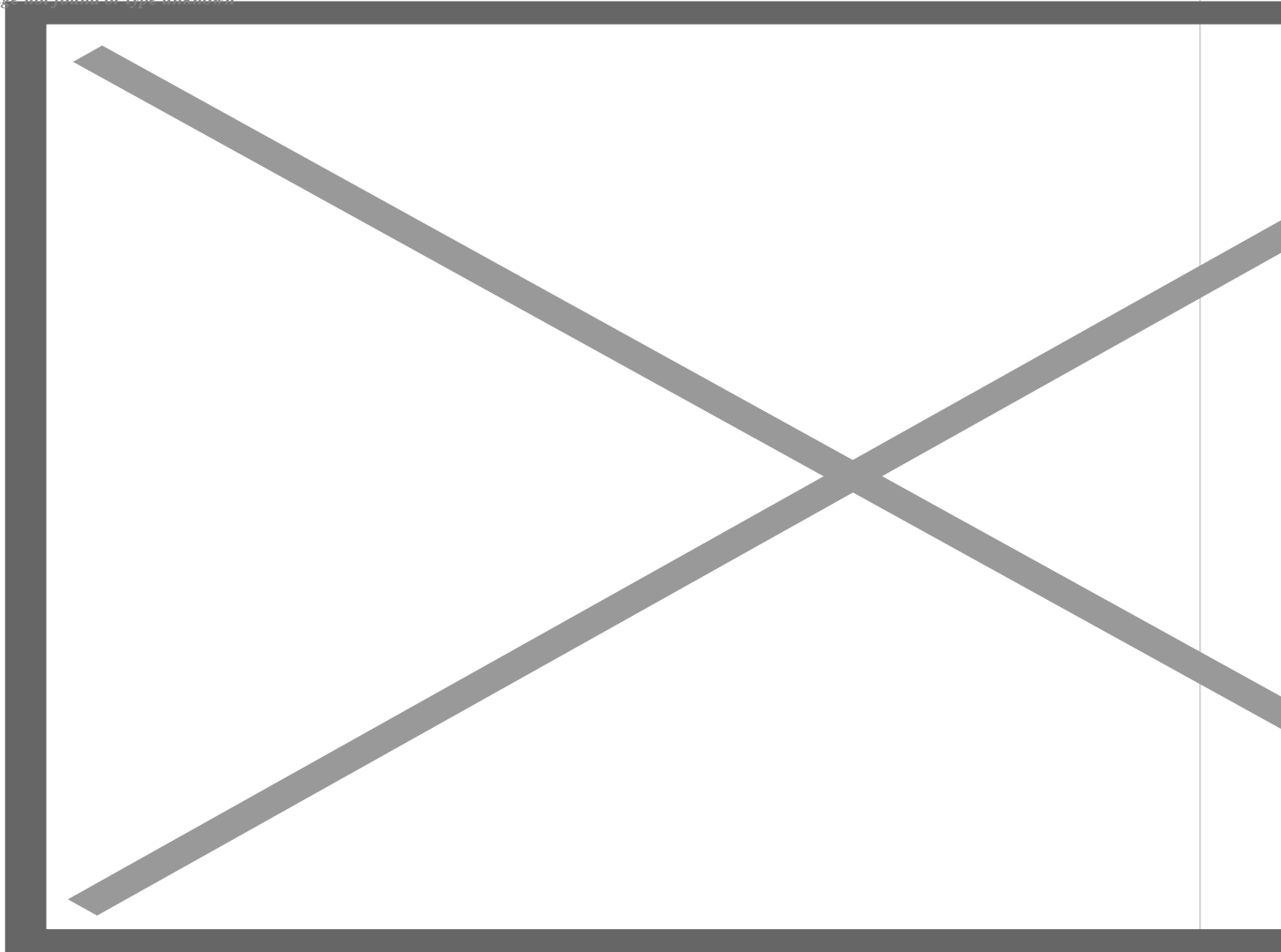


Israel seizes 70 Palestine homes in occupied West Bank

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Gun-toting Israeli forces stand guard as heavy machines demolish Palestinian homes as part of Tel Aviv's illegal expansion policy. (File photo)

Ramallah, April 30 (RHC)-- Israeli occupying authorities have started plans to confiscate at least 70 Palestinian homes in the occupied southern West Bank. Imad Hamdan, director of the al-Khalil

Construction Committee, a Palestinian government body, said on Sunday that the Israeli authorities plan to hand over the Palestinian homes to Israeli settlers in the Old City of the governorate of al-Khalil. "The Israeli raid of Nasreddine Building is the start of the implementation of the Israeli plan," Hamdan added.

At the same time, Hamdan stressed that the Palestinians "are the genuine owners of these homes and shops." The official reiterated that Palestinian ownership of these buildings is protected by local and international laws, which prevent forced expulsion.

Meanwhile, Issa Amro, a Palestinian activist in al-Khalil strongly criticized the committee's "weak response" to the Israeli plans. "The start of the implementation of the Israeli plan, disclosed early this year, sounds a dangerous alarm." He said. "The forced expulsion of Palestinians out of Nasreddine Building, which is located in the most sensitive places in the Old City, is not an incident to pass without any official action." Amro accused the committee of coordinating the theft of Palestinian property with the Israeli occupying authorities.

The activist condemned the silence of the committee over the demolition of six Palestinian shops by Israeli settlers in the heart of the city a couple of days ago, stating that the committee is able to do much more for the protection of Palestinian property in the city.

Israel routinely demolishes Palestinian houses in the occupied West Bank and East al-Quds, claiming that the structures have been built without permits, which are almost impossible to obtain. They also sometimes order Palestinian owners to demolish their own houses or pay the costs of the demolition.

Israel has already occupied thousands of dunums of Palestinian agricultural land to construct and expand new illegal settler units in various areas in the West Bank.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and al-Quds.

All Israeli settlements are illegal under international law. The United Nations Security Council has condemned Israel's settlement activities in the occupied territories in several resolutions.

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