

Israel demolishes Palestinian homes as collective punishment

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Ramallah, June 11 (RHC)-- At dawn on Thursday, Israeli forces stormed Ramallah city in the occupied West Bank and blew up the family home of a Palestinian prisoner. The large contingent of Israeli soldiers poured into Ramallah al-Tahta (lower Ramallah) in the Old City area, cordoning off the family home of 27-year-old Islam Faroukh.

According to residents, the Israelis spent hours planting explosives that later pulverised the Faroukh family's apartment. Video footage of the operation showed soldiers painstakingly planting explosives in the walls of the home before the massive blast that turned the spacious apartment to ruins and rubble, while also blowing out the windows of homes in the neighbourhood.

"My son is still under arrest and has not been tried yet," Islam's mother Abeer Faroukh told Al Jazeera. "How is the house blown up in such a way that affected the whole neighbourhood, before a fair trial for my son?" she asked.

With her son innocent until proven guilty in court, Abeer Faroukh says the “real crime” was the destruction of the family’s home and the damage done to the neighbourhood. Demolishing the homes of Palestinians “suspected of carrying out attacks” on Israelis is a long-held practice of Israel. Thousands of Palestinian people have lost their homes to demolitions in what human rights groups say is a policy by Israel of “collective punishment” that may amount to war crimes.

“International humanitarian law, including the Hague Regulations of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention, prohibits collective punishment, including deliberately harming the relatives of those accused of committing crimes, in all circumstances,” Human Rights Watch said in February. “Courts around the world have treated collective punishment as a war crime,” the rights group said.

Arrested in December, Islam Faroukh was accused of carrying out bomb attacks at bus stops in Jerusalem that killed two people, including an Israeli-Canadian teenager, and wounded 14 others. He has denied the allegations. “We are sure that he is innocent,” said Harbi Faroukh, Islam’s father, adding that his son may face a life sentence in jail because of “unjust accusations”.

The family tried to appeal the demolition order to Israel’s High Court of Justice, seeking to have their homes sealed rather than destroyed, but to no avail. “The house is not ours. It belongs to Islam’s grandfather, and we tried to clarify this matter with the Israeli authorities,” the father said.

Six Palestinians were injured in the clashes and brought to the Palestinian Medical Complex. One was treated for a bullet wound in the flank, and two others were treated for bullet wounds in the thigh and foot. Another was hit by a rubber-coated metal bullet in the hand, and two were treated for inhalation of toxic tear gas, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

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