

How Israel forces more Palestinians out of Jerusalem

Three young men in occupied East Jerusalem have become "test cases" for Israel's residency revocation policy.

[Ylenia Gostoli](#) | 12 May 2016 17:33 GMT |

Jerusalem - Tucked away on a steep, potholed street in Sur Baher, a suburb in the southeastern hills of Jerusalem, Sarah Ali Dwayat's apartment sits empty.

On the front porch, a large banner bears the photographs of five teenagers from the neighbourhood currently imprisoned by Israel. One of them is her 19-year-old son, Abed.

The group stands accused of throwing stones at Israeli vehicles on a highway, allegedly causing the death of a driver, after clashes between police and Palestinian youths last September, on the eve of the Jewish New Year.

The trial is still going on, but already some of their family members have been forced from their homes - the victims of new measures ostensibly aimed at deterring alleged Palestinian attackers.

"When we got the confiscation notice, we took all the furniture out, and now it's scattered with friends and neighbours," Sarah said, pushing back a metal sheet covering one window to sneak a look inside.

Doorknobs to the home have been broken off, and entrances sealed with melted metal plates. Sarah, a widow for 15 years, and her 24-year-old daughter have moved to a smaller apartment in the same area, provided by a neighbour as a goodwill gesture.

Sooner or later, they will have to start paying rent again, Sarah acknowledged - and with property prices sky-high in Jerusalem, they will not be able to afford it. "We had just started renovation work. Abed had found a job and had started to help. We are still paying the debts," Sarah, 59, told Al Jazeera.

"When they came to seal the house [last month], a soldier told me, in Arabic, that it was to send a message to others, so they wouldn't carry out more acts of terror."

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Since last October, tensions have boiled over into violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the blockaded Gaza Strip.

During this period, the Israeli army has [killed](#) at least 206 Palestinians, including protesters, bystanders and alleged attackers, while 33 Israelis have been killed in stabbing and shooting incidents.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [announced](#) a series of measures directed at alleged Palestinian attackers and their families, including the demolition or sealing of attackers' homes and the revocation of permanent residency status for Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem.

Munir Nusseibeh, a human rights lawyer and director of the Community Action Centre at al-Quds University, believed that Sarah's son and two of his co-accused, Muhammad Abu Kaf, 17, and Mustafa Atrash, 18, were "test cases". Israel's interior minister issued a decision to strip all three of their Jerusalem residency in January, a move that is now being appealed in court.

"They are the first at risk of residency revocation for throwing stones, and the first whose families have been displaced from their homes for throwing stones," Nusseibeh told Al Jazeera.

A letter to Abed's lawyer from the Israeli Interior ministry states that "a permanent residency status in Israel is based on a material connection between the resident and the state" and that it "requires basic commitment and loyalty in view of the fact that residency, and all the more so permanent residency, is not a status which only grants rights without any obligations".

When Israel [occupied and unilaterally annexed](#) East Jerusalem in 1967, Palestinians were designated as "permanent residents" rather than citizens of the state, a status akin to that of migrants in a foreign country. Since then, over [14,000 have had their residency revoked](#).

Over the years, the criteria for revoking residency have broadened. Two decades ago, Israel's interior ministry revoked the residency of Palestinians who lived abroad for seven or more years, or who obtained residency or citizenship status in another country.

But after the Oslo Accords, a new policy was introduced whereby Palestinians would lose residency rights if they established their "centre of life" outside of Israel - such as in the West Bank or Gaza. Some 11,000 out of the 14,000 had their residency revoked under this policy.

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In 2006, three elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council had their Jerusalem residency revoked on new grounds: "breach of allegiance to the state". Their case is still pending before the Supreme Court.

"No one was arguing that these parliamentarians posed a specific security threat to Israel, but rather it was because of their political belonging that they decided to cancel their right to live in Jerusalem," Nusseibeh said, noting that there are 13 known cases of residency revocation under the allegiance criteria.

"If the Supreme Court approves the residency revocations in the 2006 case based on breach of allegiance, this will make a new important precedent - it will be the first time that the Supreme Court approves revoking residency based on political, rather than security reasons," Nusseibeh said.

"All Palestinians in Jerusalem will be at risk of residency revocation according to the allegiance criteria, because Palestinians in East Jerusalem see the occupation as temporary and Israel as a foreign occupying power."

Abu Walid, the father of Mustafa Atrash, was indignant at this policy. "Allegiance, which allegiance? We pay tax to the Israeli municipality, and we get nothing in return," he told Al Jazeera. "Did Yigal Amir get his citizenship revoked for killing the prime minister of Israel?" he added, referring to the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by a right-wing Israeli extremist in 1995.

Abir Joubran-Dakwar, a lawyer for the Israeli human rights organisation Hamoked who is working on the Sur Baher case, noted that there are a number of specific criteria under which citizenship can be revoked, including "breach of allegiance".

However, this does not apply to residency, she said: "A person who has his citizenship revoked becomes stateless, but the interior ministry will still have to give him a permanent residency status."

Israel's interior ministry did not respond to Al Jazeera's request for comment on the matter.

At the end of April, Israel's attorney-general temporarily suspended the revocation in the Sur Baher case, until the Supreme Court comes to a decision in the 2006 case.

Human rights groups, including [B'Tselem](#), have argued in the past that home demolitions, denial of building permits, restrictions on family reunification, and the building of the separation wall are all among the variety of methods used by Israel to forcibly displace Palestinians and maintain a Jewish majority in Jerusalem, in violation of international law.

"I believe the aim of this policy is to add a new method for the displacement of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, to be able to displace even larger numbers," Nusseibeh said. "That's our concern."

Source: Al Jazeera

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