

Spotlight: Wadi al-Maleh

Displacing the Palestinian Population Using Multiple Methods of Oppression

Wadi al-Maleh is in the northern Jordan Valley Governorate of Tubas in the northern West Bank within Area C, and consists of eight villages: Maleh, 'Ein el-Hilweh, Farasiyeh, Hamsa, al-Hadidiya, Samra, Khelet Makhul, and Himma. Municipal services are provided by the Projects Committee for Wadi al-Maleh, formed by the Palestinian Ministry of Local Government.

- Nearly 3,300 Palestinians live in the communities of Wadi al-Maleh; this number is in flux due to demolitions, evictions, and other means of forced displacement.
- Livestock is the main source of income for 90% of the total population of this region; the other 10% is dependent on other forms of agriculture.
- The estimated number of livestock in this region includes 22,000 heads of goats and sheep, 1,300 cows, and 60 camels.
- The people and the territory of Wadi al-Maleh are isolated from Tubas and the rest of the West Bank by the Israeli checkpoint at Tayasir, which was permanently established by the occupation army in late September 2000, in the wake of the Second Intifada.

The Israeli Occupation Army has designated all the land in this region as closed military zones, a classification that does not allow for villages to build or expand in order to accommodate their demographic growth.

The communities in Wadi al-Maleh have been targeted for displacement by the Israeli Occupation using multiple methods:

- Demolition of homes
- Demolition of livestock shelters and structures
- Restricted access to grazing land via declaration of extensive military zones
- Restricted access to natural sources of water
- Limited mobility in the region due to a highly restrictive military checkpoint

As a result of these methods, Palestinians are opting to move from the land and lifestyle they have known for generations, forced to fulfill the unofficial Israeli strategy promoting “voluntary migration.”

"You don't simply bundle people onto trucks and drive them away ... I prefer to advocate a more positive policy, to create, in effect, a condition that in a positive way will induce people to leave."

~Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

1. As quoted by David Bernstein in "Forcible Removal of Arabs gaining support in Israel," *The (London) Times*, August 24, 1988, page 7. Cited in *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion* by Nur Masalha; Chapter 2, footnote 117.

Demolition of Homes

Frequent demolitions of residential and agricultural structures throughout the communities of Wadi al-Maleh have raised concerns about the fate and future of not only the residents, but of these entire communities. In 2010, Wadi al-Maleh endured three waves of demolitions to 93 buildings, which accounted for 52% of the total demolitions in the Jordan Valley that year. And until October of 2011, the occupation authorities demolished 21 properties in these eight communities, which amounted to 16.5% of the 128 demolitions recorded in the Jordan Valley that year.

Demolition of Livestock Shelters and Structures

Raising livestock, the primary livelihood for residents of Wadi al-Maleh, has been primary in this region because of the abundance of natural pastures. However, it is threatened by the ongoing practices of the Israeli occupation army. Israel has declared military zones across the entire region, thereby disabling, obstructing, and preventing shepherds from taking their animals to graze on land that has traditionally been used for this purpose.

Restricted Access to Grazing Land via Declaration of Extensive Military Zones

In addition to these restrictions, this livelihood is further sabotaged by the demolition of livestock shelters and barracks. Of the 93 demolitions in Wadi al-Maleh in 2010, 58 of the demolished structures (62%) were shelters or barracks for livestock. In 2011, 12 (57%) of the 21 demolished structures were for livestock.

Restricted Access to Natural Sources of Water

The Israeli occupation has also restricted access to water as a strategy to force Palestinians to leave the Wadi al-Maleh region. The occupation authorities drilled a well in upper Wadi al-Maleh, and prevented Palestinians from restoring, maintaining, or withdrawing water from small springs in the area. The occupation authorities have also banned Palestinians from drilling new wells and from harvesting rainwater for the purposes of farming. These restrictions force residents of Wadi al-Maleh to purchase expensive water tanks and pay for it to be transported from the villages of 'Ein el-Beida and Bardala, which has increased the already high costs of living and raising livestock in this region.

Limited Mobility in the Region Due to a Highly Restrictive Military Checkpoint

The Tayasir military checkpoint enhances the isolation and stress of Palestinian civilians in the region. In order to access this area, Israeli policies require travelers to provide identification cards that indicate residence in the Jordan Valley; those who live elsewhere in the West Bank are refused to pass through the checkpoint. This creates an additional impediment to the social, economic, and even educational integration with the rest of Palestine, which furthers the divisive aims of the occupation.

End Result: “Voluntary Migration”

In Wadi al-Maleh, residential and agricultural structures are constantly and repeatedly targeted for demolitions, and the residents face worsening restrictions regarding their mobility and access to resources such as land and water. These oppressive practices incur escalating costs on Palestinian residents, ultimately resulting in their “voluntary” migration from the region in order to avert further losses year after year. For example, the Ka'abna family, comprised of 32 members and nearly 700 head of cattle, abandoned the region towards the less targeted sites near cities in Area A.

Indeed, this has been Israel's plan as stated by former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 1988: “You don't simply bundle people onto trucks and drive them away... I prefer to advocate a positive policy, to create, in effect, a condition that in a positive way will induce people to leave.” This strategy has proven successful: the Israeli occupation has created such difficult conditions in Wadi el-Maleh and throughout the Jordan Valley that entire families leave to avoid repeated targeting and are effectively displaced from their homes and land.

