

Earlier today (Saturday, 13 February 2021), Combatants for Peace activists, in a symbolic act of protest, dismantled part of a fence that had been illegally erected by Israeli settlers in the Jordan Valley in order to prevent Palestinian shepherds from reaching grazing lands with their herds. This fence is in itself an act of violence inasmuch as it denies local Palestinians their very livelihood. However, it is also a symbol of a much wider reality of unbridled brutality unleashed on local Palestinian communities by Israeli settlers, with the active or silent support of Israeli authorities. This policy amounts to what we must call “creeping ethnic cleansing,” and yet the international community allows it to go unchecked. We in Combatants for Peace can no longer let this fence stand, nor can we ignore the apartheid mentality it represents. Instead of the fence, our activists placed signs saying “here stood an apartheid fence.”

#### **Background:**

The fence was erected in stages and delimitates two areas: one section around [Maskiyot](#) and the other between [Hemdat](#) and Umm Zuka. It blocks access for seven communities, encompassing hundreds of Palestinians, preventing them from reaching extensive grazing areas covering thousands of acres. The fence itself is a simple cattle fence built by small teams of teenagers from the surrounding "farms" (unauthorized Israeli outposts). The settlers further use loudspeakers to play deafening music; they pay intimidating nocturnal visits to the local Palestinian encampments, and drive vehicles into their herds. In parallel, the settlers bring their cattle to graze in the same areas. The army, for its part, regularly confiscates the Palestinians' tractors and water tanks, uses roadblocks to limit the freedom of movement, and demolishes encampments, leaving whole families exposed to severe cold and rain in the winter, and merciless heat in the summer. The combination of these measures is clearly intended to empty the northern Jordan Valley of its Palestinian inhabitants and push them from Area C into Areas A and B.

The fence represents a dangerous escalation. Even all the above measures of harassment combined were unable to fully prevent the Palestinians from reaching their grazing lands and, thus, deny them their livelihood. The fence was apparently erected to accomplish exactly that.

We in Combatants for Peace stand with these local Palestinian communities, among the most vulnerable communities in the West Bank. We have approached the Israeli authorities (including the Israeli army Chief of Staff), multiple times to highlight the impact of the fence on local communities. We were informed that the fence was indeed illegal and that the army would remove it, but nothing happened on the ground.

We consider the fence, and the reality which it represents, a deeply unjust and inhumane structure. Therefore, we have taken the act of destroying the fence, as an act of sorely needed civil disobedience, on behalf of the disenfranchised local communities that cannot afford to take the risk of such an act.

We call upon the international community to turn its attention to the ethnic cleansing that is being carried out systematically in the northern Jordan Valley and in much of the broader area of Area C.