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## OPT: EU pressure for aid change in Area C



Photo: [Tamar Dressler/IRIN](#)

Solar panels installed in Area C

JERUSALEM, 26 July 2012 (IRIN) - As demolition orders continue to threaten the work of humanitarian organizations in Israeli-controlled [Area C](#) in the West Bank, the European Union (EU) and humanitarian agencies are pressing to change the rules of the aid game.

"We all know that when we turn one stone in Area C, what we get is confrontation with the occupying power," Ulrich Nitschke, project director at the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) in the West Bank city of Ramallah, told IRIN. "But now, there is a major policy shift among the member states of the EU."

Land in the West Bank is categorized as A, B and C. Area A is under the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA), and Area B the joint control of Israel and the PA. About 95 percent of Palestinians live in these two areas, though they make up only 40 percent of the land area. In Area C, Israel retains military authority and full control over building permission.

Instead of making the implementation of EU-funded projects in Area C dependent on the Israeli Civil Administration and its requirement to obtain a permit, a new process is now guiding the EU's approach.

"They are pressuring Israel to reach an actual game change in Area C. There has to be a game change," says Tsafir Cohen, Middle East coordinator of the German organization Medico International.

The first step of the new process is the development of legal and technical guidelines (master plans) for each local community in need under the leadership of the local Palestinian governments. The master plans are then presented to the Israeli Civil Administration, which opens a case for each locality submitted, and is asked to check whether all legal and technical requirements are met.

"As soon as we get a green light on the technical stuff, the EU donors are counting six months. If there is still no permit issued after that, the project is implemented without," Nitschke said.

So far, a total of 24 master plans have been submitted; four were technically approved by the Israeli government in January 2011, but no permits have yet been issued. "Obviously six months have passed since then. But some member states got cold feet and wanted to double-check with Brussels before," Nitschke said.

Meanwhile, some EU member states have formed an interest group to advocate change, including Germany, the UK, Belgium, Denmark, France, Sweden and the EU Commission, he added.

### "Demolition can happen any time"

Each year, hundreds of Palestinians in Area C have their homes demolished by the Israeli authorities because they are unable to obtain permits for their buildings. In 2011 alone, about 1,100 Palestinians were displaced due to home demolitions by Israeli forces, over 80 percent more than in 2010, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

(OCHA) said in a [report](#).

“The Israeli authorities claim that structures are demolished because they lack building permits. However, the reality is that it is next to impossible for Palestinians to obtain such permits, leaving them no option but to build without them to meet their basic needs for shelter,” Ramesh Rajasingham, head of OCHA in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), told IRIN.

OCHA says that a total of 620 structures were torn down in the West Bank in 2011, of which 62 were European-funded projects.

Medico International faced demolition orders on (mostly standalone) wind and solar energy facilities it built in collaboration with the Israeli organization Community, Energy, and Technology in the Middle East (COMET-ME) in the south Hebron hills, which has become a hotspot of demolitions and forced displacement over the last years.

Tsafrir Cohen said his organization had hitherto been able to prevent the demolition of its energy installations through an effective diplomatic and public outreach campaign, in particular in Germany. “But the orders are there and demolition could happen any time.”

Some 1,500 Palestinians in the south Hebron hills are dependent on a similar alternative energy supply, because the Israeli authorities are preventing them from being connected to the electricity grid, he said, adding: “Thousands of people still don’t have electricity in the Hebron hills. We have thousands more in Jordan valley. But we simply can’t assist properly because of the permit problem.”

Aid agencies operating in Area C are currently facing a dangerous situation, said Cohen. “If we only build humanitarian infrastructure where Israel allows us to, we are in danger of being pushed out of Area C together with the Palestinians,” he said.

Medico International [calls this process](#) a “policy of targeted de-development”, aimed at forcing the Palestinian population out of Area C into the densely populated urban enclaves. “In the end we will work in a Bantustan,” Cohen added.

### Sidestepping the permits?

Some donors hoped that permits might be made available for solar and wind energy harvesting systems in Area C, but their hopes were dashed: “We don’t get any permits, so we simply build without,” Elad Orian, co-founder of COMET-ME, told IRIN. At least eight of the standalone energy systems the organization installed in recent years are under threat of demolition, he added.

The EU effort to change the rules of the game is encouraging for agencies implementing projects in Area C, but Orian said it remains close to impossible to get international funding for COMET-ME projects without a permit from the Israeli authorities.

The policy shift led by the EU reflects a greater focus on international humanitarian law (IHL) instead of Israeli administrative rules, said Cohen, adding: “Israel uses administrative law above IHL. No one does enough to stop them.”

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**Theme(s):** [Human Rights](#), [Conflict](#), [Aid Policy](#),

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