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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jerusalem Center for Women

# No women's rights for Palestinian women

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**Another Palestinian family evicted from the home they built “illegally” ... but no home is too illegal for Israeli settlers to occupy.**

Maha Al Kurd is a little over 2 years old. As her grandmother Rifka al Kurd describes how the Israeli settlers barged into her courtyard and into the al Kurd family's home, Maha runs around in her pink coat. It's cold and gloomy outside in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, but Maha's father Nabeel is still sitting in a tent in the courtyard of what was his home, offering strong Arabic coffee to the friends and neighbors who have come to show their support.



The Al Kurd's put up the tent early in November, when Maha's family was evicted from the extension of the extended family home. The extension was built “illegally” to house Nabeel and his growing family: his wife Maysoon and their four children, including tiny Maha. Since then, Israeli settlers have been trying to occupy the extension, but were evacuated by the police. The Al Kurd family turned to the Israeli court: building permits have always been nearly impossible to obtain for Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, while internationally illegal Jewish only settlements keep growing. The Al Kurd's knew their appeal in Israeli court had been rejected one week ago on December 1<sup>st</sup>,

when 85 year old Rifka al Kurd saw the settlers push her gate open, march into her son's part of the house and start throwing his possessions out on the front garden, where they're still lying under the drizzling rain now.

There is [a heartrending video](#) on the internet, which international volunteers managed to shoot and hide before the Israeli police protecting the settlers arrested them and confiscated their cameras. The video shows the frail and elderly Rifka al Kurd trying to stop the settlers from occupying her house. What you don't see in the video is Rifka being hit by the settlers and later taken to the hospital: when I spoke to the Al Kurd family, Rifka told me her arm still hurts and she can't move it.

What you also cannot see in the video is the hope in her voice when she tells me of how a member of the British parliament came to visit her, after the settlers evicted her son from his family home. She says he promised help from London. When I ask her who the representative was, the old lady is apologetic. She didn't think of asking for his card, to know who he was.

It doesn't matter much whether the visitor was really a British MP or not: what is truly heartbreaking, more than Maysoon al Kurd bending to salvage what she can of her things scattered on the ground in the courtyard, more than the young gloating settlers, sitting on the Al Kurd front door and staring insolently at the Palestinian owners and at the foreigners coming to interview them or just to support, more than the justifiable anger surfacing here and there when you listen to one more tale of abuse and dispossession, more than all of this, it is that Rifka still has hope for help from Europe. To me, this is what is hardest to bear.



Palestinians have been waiting for 61 years, since the Nakba (catastrophe) took away their homeland and their rights. They have been waiting for justice, waiting for the West - who aided and supported the creation of Israel - to recognize Palestinians' rights too. It is touching and tragic at the same time that Palestinians should still hope that the West will see what is actually happening and finally give justice where justice is due.

Rifka, Maha, Nabeel, and the rest of the al Kurd family are just the last victims of the Israeli policy of judaization of occupied East Jerusalem. Through a variety of restrictions and abuses – including denial of building permits, home evictions, home demolitions, withdrawal of residence permits, refusal of family unification permits and the Apartheid Wall - Palestinian residents are being pushed out of Jerusalem in order to make space for settlements reserved only for Jewish residents. This policy of judaization has only intensified since the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, and takes place in blatant violation of international law.

In the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood there are 28 Palestinian families, all refugees from 1948, threatened with becoming refugees again by the planned construction of the 200 settlement units of Shimon HaTzadik. Women from the Hannoun and the Al Ghawi families, next-door neighbors evicted from their Sheikh Jarrah homes just a few months ago, are among the many coming to comfort Rifka al Kurd. But the women are probably being comforted by Rifka as well. For the last four months the Al Ghawi's have been living in a tent in front of what was their home. Their house is now occupied by a group of Israeli settlers, who are living in the house as if it were their own, and as if the Al Ghawi family were not living outside on the street in the cold. Israeli police have destroyed the al Ghawi's tent at least five times, confiscating the few things the family had managed to keep: a table, chairs, cots for the men to sleep on at night.

Made homeless by a racist system that respects no international law, these ladies snap when someone mentions women's rights: "There are neither women's rights, nor children's rights for Palestinians! Police came at 5am and kicked my 5 year old out of his bed and in the streets in his pajama, without shoes! They didn't give us time to dress, they beat my daughter! What women's rights are these?"



By the time I am done talking to the family, little Maha al Kurd gets tired of running around the cramped space where her family has no choice but to fit. Their belongings are crammed into boxes, which further cramps the space. Next to them her older sister Muna is trying to do her homework on a table. Life has to continue as much as possible, at least for the children. Maha starts to cry, and the women are distracted as one of them rocks her and sings a lullaby to try to get her to sleep. “She wants her own bed, her bedroom” her mother Maysoon says, “but what can I do?”

There is not much Maysoon can do, but there is plenty the international community can do.

The Jerusalem Center for Women works to support women and their families in East Jerusalem in their quest to resist their ethnic cleansing from the city, and to achieve a just compromise on the city’s future as the capital of two states. JCW calls on all interested parties to demand that Israeli authorities end their current discriminatory policies, and for all sides to put Jerusalem at the top of the political agenda for talks and status resolution.