

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

East Jerusalem and Gaza

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UNISON responds to the situation in Gaza

UNISON has expressed its deep concern about the escalation of tensions in East Jerusalem in recent weeks, including the scenes at al-Aqsa Mosque during the holy month of Ramadan.

The union has also condemned the violence and the bombing of Gaza, and expressed its regret at the tragic loss of life and injuries to Palestinians and Israelis.

The escalation has happened in part due to the planned evictions of Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah, a neighbourhood in East Jerusalem, in addition to the police raid on al-Aqsa and increasing restrictions on Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

The families have lived in Sheikh Jarrah since the 1950s, following

the 1948 Nakba, when they were forced from their homes and lands to become refugees.

UNISON has been following the situation in Sheikh Jarrah closely since a delegation from the NEC international committee and regions visited the home of the Al-Kurd family in 2016. The family had had half its home taken over by settlers in 2009, and is now expecting to be evicted from the home where it has lived since the 1950s.

UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea wrote to the UK

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government to protest at the planned evictions at the end of April, ahead of the initial proposed deadline for a number of families to leave their homes on 2 May 2021.

Her letter urged the UK government to put pressure on the Israeli government to stop the evictions, settlement building and destruction of Palestinian property, while also calling for an end to trade with the illegal settlements and the suspension of the UK Israel Association Agreement until its human rights provisions are respected.

The letter said: "We understand that there are over 70 Palestinian refugee families in Karm AlJa'ouni who are at risk of forced eviction by the Israeli authorities. Many live in homes that were built for them in 1956 by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, following an agreement with the Jordanian government.

"The eviction orders have been brought under the 1970 Legal and Administrative Law by a private settler organisation, which plans to replace the homes with settlements."

And it continued: "In addition to losing their homes, the refugee families concerned also face legal costs and risk losing their residency rights to live in occupied East Jerusalem. Since 1967, approximately 14,000 Palestinians have had their residency revoked."

Between January and March 2021, 292 Palestinian buildings were targeted by Israeli authorities in the West Bank, including 109 donor aid funded buildings, displacing 455 Palestinians.

This represents an increase since 2020, during which 848 buildings were targeted, displacing 996 Palestinians. Not only do these acts violate fundamental human rights and are illegal under international law, they undermine the prospects of a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel.

In January this year, UN special rapporteur Michael Lynk said that the eviction orders issued by Israeli courts, if carried out, would constitute a violation by the occupation authority "of the ban on forced displacement of the population protected by Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention."

Regardless of international law, Israeli settlers and the Israeli army have proceeded to intimidate Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah. Israeli non-governmental organisation Peace Now has affirmed that the courts issuing these eviction orders are "nothing more than the tool used by the settlers, with the close support of the state authorities, to commit the crime of displacing an entire community and replacing it with a settlement."

UNISON head of international Nick Crook said: "We remain extremely concerned by the increasing regularity of forced removals of Palestinians from their homes, the destruction of Palestinian property, and the building of illegal Israeli settlements on occupied land."

In recent days, the situation in East Jerusalem has escalated dramatically, with more than 300 injured when police raided the Al-Aqsa mosque and many more were injured in attacks on protestors in Sheikh Jarrah and subsequent unrest in Israel and Palestine.

Palestinian health workers report that they have faced significant barriers responding to the wounded. According to reports on Tuesday morning, an additional 35 Palestinians had died in Gaza after Israeli military airstrikes the previous night, whilst five people in Israel died after rockets were fired from Gaza.