

position paper

Dec 2023

Wadi As-Seeq



Background photo by courtesy of Sarit Michaeli

Wadi as-Seeq is located in the Ramallah governorate, east of Deir Dubwan. For almost three decades it was the home of a herder community of approximately 30 families, totaling 180 individuals, 40 of whom are children. Most of the residents are landless refugees, from the Ka'abneh tribe, and lease the land from its Deir Dubwan landowners.



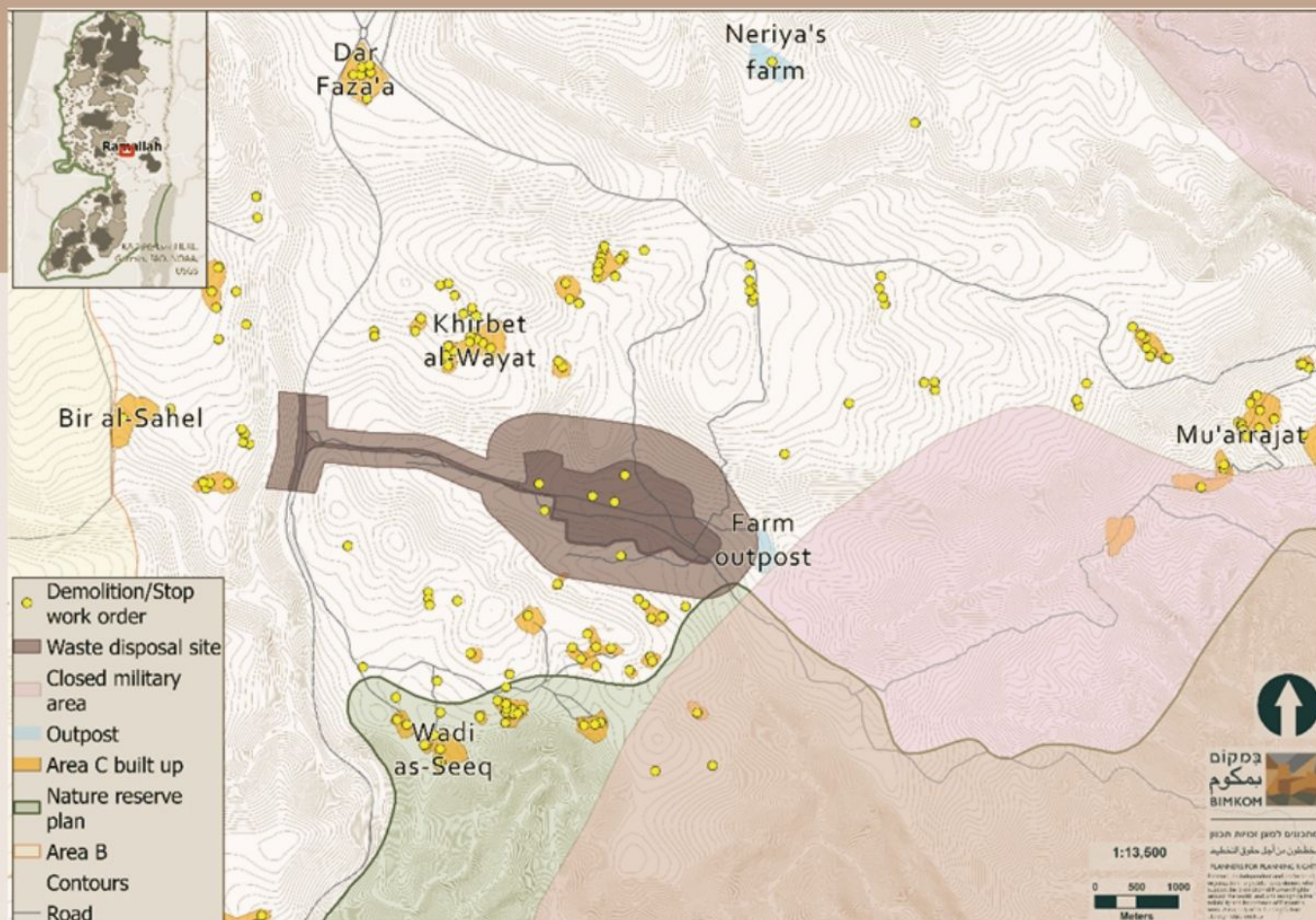
photo by courtesy of Alon Cohen Lifshitz

For years, the community was under threat of forcible transfer, due to combined pressures exerted by Israeli authorities and settlers. These pressures peaked during the onslaught against herder communities throughout the West Bank, that followed the outbreak of the Gaza war. After days of repeated attacks and threats, they were violently uprooted and forced to flee to neighboring villages.

On October 12, settlers, backed by rogue soldiers, raided the Wadi as-Seeq community, shooting in the air, brutally attacking and driving out the remaining residents. Following an appeal to the army, residents of the community returned five days later to retrieve the belongings they had left behind, only to discover that they had been looted. These include valuables, supplies, a vehicle, sheep, a water tank, produce and most of the solar panels. Settlers later returned to the place several times to demolish the remaining structures.

A history of displacement

For the members the Wadi as-Seeq community, their violent uprooting is the latest chapter in a history of displacement: In 1948 they were driven out of the Naqab, in 1967 from the Hebron Hills, in the 1980s from the Deir Dubwan area, and in the 1990s, from Wadi Makook. In 1995 they moved to Wadi a-Seeq in accordance with the agreement they had reached with the army as part of an appeal to the high court. Only a few years later, Israeli authorities planned to displace these communities, together with other Bedouin communities to Nuweima, but the plan was frozen in 2014 due to strong objections from the communities.



Institutional violence

For years, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) tried to make the community leave by denying them basic infrastructure, preventing development, damaging their livelihood, and creating a sense of general insecurity. All this laid the ground for their eventual forcible transfer. The ICA regards Wadi as-Seeq as an illegal settlement, and therefore applies strict enforcement measures against it, and disregards its presence while deliberating plans in the area. Most of the structures in the area have been issued demolition/stop work orders and many demolitions have taken place in the last three years. Moreover, a seizure order still hangs over the local school. Further evidence of the ICA's blatant disregard for the community's welfare, is their approval of the plan for the Ramun waste disposal site only a few hundred meters from the houses and grazing lands, without any consideration of its potential effects on them. The threat that the waste disposal site posed to their livelihood came on top of already existing restrictions on grazing in the Makook nature reserve and the closed military zone, that severely limited access to grazing land.

Harassment and Threats to personal safety

In addition to the abovementioned institutional violence, settlers are successfully carrying out a gradual ethnic cleansing of the Wadi as-Seeq area through intimidation, harassment, and the restriction of access to pasturage and water sources. At first, several families gradually left and moved to Khirbet Abu Falah and Jaljaliya due to harassment by settlers from Neriya's farm. This cleared the way for the establishment of a new outpost in February 2023, which then served as a front base for terrorizing the Wadi as-Seeq herders. Settlers from the outpost would prevent access to pasturage and water sources, destroy crops, approach the houses and threaten residents, fly a drone over the flocks and the houses, make disturbing noises, throw animal corpses near the school, and on one occasion attempted to steal 120 sheep.

The Israeli police did little or nothing to stop these attacks and the residents of Wadi as-Seeq were left helpless against the armed settlers, who acted with impunity. In addition to this lack of action, the presence of Israeli soldiers during some of these attacks served to strengthen the notion that Israeli authorities were working hand in hand with settlers to forcibly transfer the community.



Wadi As-Seeq family's recent shelter at Turmusa'ya



photo by courtesy of Alon Cohen Lifshitz

Displacement

The community is currently scattered over the area, living in makeshift tents on land that they leased or received temporary permission to stay on. Some families have temporarily settled around a-Taybeh while others, who had already left, settled in the area of Al-A'uja, Turmusa'ya, and Ramun. Members of the community were left to fend for themselves under impossible circumstances: they were cut off from a supporting social network, the natural resources on which they depend for their livelihood, and an educational framework for the children.

One person, who fled Wadi as-Seeq before October 2023 due to settler violence, described some of the difficulties of being uprooted. The family leased land from residents of Turmusa'ya in area B, but the land is not suitable for grazing as it is an olive orchard. Thus, the family is forced to buy fodder to feed their herd. In addition, the land has no running water, electricity, or access to roads. The resident also described the effect of displacement on his children and their education:

As many Palestinian herder communities throughout the oPt are being forcibly transferred, the international community must pressure Israel to fulfill its legal responsibility to protect the occupied population and create conditions that will enable the safe return of these communities to their land. The so-called "illegal" status of these herder communities' villages has been a constant source of instability and insecurity for their residents, providing fertile ground for violent settlers who wish to uproot them. As a first step towards the immediate return of these communities, the ICA must grant an exemption from permits for their rebuilding and initiate official long-term planning with and for the community. Furthermore, Israeli authorities must remove outposts that threaten the community and firmly react to any acts of violence perpetrated by Israeli civilians or security forces.

“They had to transfer to a school in Turmusa'ya, where they are taught with a different approach and are surrounded by children they do not know. Not at all a simple transition.”



Background photo by courtesy of Sarit Michaeli

