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EU diplomats unite in support of demolition-threatened Palestinian village

European envoys visit West Bank village in show of solidarity after Israeli court rules it can be demolished and its residents evicted

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A Palestinian man gestures as he speaks with Alastair McPhail, British Consul General to Jerusalem, during his visit with Palestinian Prime Minister and European officials to Susya village, south of the West Bank city of Hebron Photo: Reuters



By [Robert Tait](#), Khirbet Susiya

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European diplomats put on a collective show of opposition to [Israeli settlements](#) and the forced displacement of [Palestinians](#) on Monday by visiting a West Bank village facing imminent demolition.

Envoys from all 28 European Union member states' Jerusalem consulates - including Britain - arrived en masse at Khirbet Susiya in the South Hebron Hills to send a sharp message to Israel not to implement an eviction order that some said would damage the chances of resolving the decades-old conflict with the Palestinians.

The delegation attended a ceremony highlighting the plight of around 300 villagers who face being made homeless after the Israeli high court upheld a plan to demolish their ramshackle houses and force them to relocate.



Boys ride a donkey in the village (AFP)

The court last month rejected the villagers' petition to freeze proposals to demolish their homes by the Civil Administration, Israel's military ruling authority in the West Bank, which argued that they have been built without permission and lack necessary infrastructure.

Residents insist that they have been forced to build illegally because permits are never granted and they accuse the Israeli authorities of deliberately denying them access to facilities.

They say Israel wants rid of the village - which lies in Area C, a zone officially controlled by the Israeli army under the 1993 Oslo peace accords - to expand the nearby Jewish settlement of Susiya, built more than 30 years ago.



French Consul General Herve Magro (C), other Consuls and EU representatives listen to speeches during their visit (AFP)

"If they demolish this village it will be a disaster," said Jihad Nawajah, head of the village council. "It's clear that the main goal is to evict the Palestinians and take the land for the expansion of the settlements."

The claim is backed up by human rights campaigners, including B'Tselem, an Israeli group, which says Israel wants to expel local Palestinians to effectively annex West Bank land before any final peace agreement is reached.

The village, which campaigners says has existed since the 19th century but has been demolished twice, in 1986 and 2001, but was rebuilt in nearby locations.

It is one of several Palestinian villages in the area fighting long-term demolition and eviction threats, some because the Israeli army claims they sit within firing practice ranges.



Children play in the West Bank village of Susya (Reuters)

John Gatt-Rutter, the EU's representative in Jerusalem, said Khirbet Susiya had become "a by-word for a policy that has deprived Palestinians of their land and resources".

"Our presence here today indicates how seriously we in the EU view the intention to demolish this village and its structure and evict its residents," he said. "But Susiya isn't an isolated case. It's hard not to draw parallels with what's happening elsewhere in the West Bank and with Bedouin communities."

Alistair McPhail, Britain's consul general, called the demolition policy "an impediment to the two-state solution", generally defined as Israel alongside a Palestinian state.

"We don't support demolitions in general and we believe the settlements are illegal," he said. "We are trying to preserve the possibility of the two-state solution and they undermine it."



A Palestinian man shakes hands with Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah (C) during Hamdallah's visit to Susya village (Reuters)

International concern over Israel's settlement policy was further highlighted on Monday when it emerged that China had delayed the departure of thousands of migrant workers to Israel after demanding that they not be employed on settlements which sit on land the Palestinians claim for a future state.

The workers were scheduled to arrive in Israel to carry out construction work as part of a previously bilateral agreement between the two governments.

An Israeli official admitted that Chinese concerns that the labourers could work on settlements had caused a stumbling block.

"We are negotiating with China for an agreement on the arrival of thousands of additional workers," the official told AFP.

"For the moment, the talks are stumbling over several problems, including the employment of these immigrants in settlements in Judea and Samaria [the biblical term for the West Bank]. Beijing is demanding that we ensure there are no workers in this region."