

## PLO NEGOTIATIONS AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

### Media Brief

# GILO – “JEWISH NEIGHBORHOOD” OR ILLEGAL SETTLEMENT?

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Over the weekend, several media outlets highlighted the Israeli decision to remove an internal barrier within the illegal Israeli settlement of Gilo (sometimes wrongly called a “Jewish neighborhood”) as a change of the status quo of the area. This is inaccurate. The following questions and answers will clarify the situation of the illegal settlement of Gilo:

- **What is the status of Gilo and other Israeli settlements under international law?**

Gilo and other Israeli settlements built in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) are illegal under international law. This is the view of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the International Committee for the Red Cross, and virtually all states except Israel. These “neighborhoods” constitute war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998).

Thus, referring to these settlements as “neighborhoods” or “communities” is misleading. A failure to describe these settlements in their accurate political context deprives audiences of the opportunity to understand a principal source of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: Israel’s illegal confiscation and colonization of Palestinian land. The terms “neighborhood” and “community” conceal the reasons why such settlements are newsworthy: they are built in violation of customary international law on land confiscated from Palestinian villagers who are prevented from accessing, cultivating or living on their ancestral lands.

- **When was the settlement of Gilo built?**

Gilo is an Israeli settlement situated on Palestinian land occupied by Israel in June 1967. In 1970, Israel confiscated land from the Palestinian villages of Beit Jala, Beit Safafa and Sharafat, and established the settlement of Gilo in 1971. Israel later confiscated additional land from the Palestinian villages of Beit Jala and Beit Safafa in order to expand Gilo.

By building the settlement of Gilo, Israel restricted the expansion of the Palestinian towns of Beit Jala, Beit Safafa and Sharafat. Gilo is part of a ring of settlements that severs East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied West Bank, including Bethlehem, a city that has

historically depended on its connection to Jerusalem. Today, Palestinians have control over less than 13% of the Bethlehem district.

- **Is the settlement of Gilo a Jerusalem “neighborhood”?**

No. In addition to the fact that Gilo is a settlement and not a neighborhood, the area over which it was built has always been part of the Bethlehem District. Many of the quarries and agricultural lands belonging to the village of Beit Jala in the Bethlehem district were located there. To say that Gilo is “part of Jerusalem” is to accept Israel’s unilateral expansion of Jerusalem’s boundaries in its attempt to annex Palestinian land – a move considered illegal by the United Nations, the European Union, the United States as well as the rest of the international community.

- **Did Israel dismantle the Wall between the illegal settlement of Gilo and Beit Jala?**

No. What Israel is doing is dismantling a barrier located inside the settlement. The wall preventing Palestinians from accessing their lands near Beit Jala remains.

- **Has Israel stopped movement restrictions around the settlement of Gilo?**

No. In fact, Israel has continued to build the illegal Wall and impose other movement restrictions in areas near Gilo, particularly inside the town of Beit Jala and the village of Wallajah. An example is the barrier erected in the valley of Bir Onah, an area between Beit Jala and Gilo, which has prevented Palestinian farmers from accessing their land.

- **Did Israel cancel its plans to grab more land around the settlement of Gilo?**

No. The route of the Wall in the area around the settlement of Gilo is expected to further divide Beit Jala from the valley of Cremisan. In this area there is a kindergarten, a football field, a winery, a monastery, a convent and land belonging to 57 Palestinian families from Beit Jala. These families will be prevented from accessing their lands if the Wall is built. Israel has destroyed and uprooted hundreds of trees to build the wall. The wall will extend over 4km and will bring Har Gilo settlement and Cremisan monastery into Gilo Settlement.