



Yesh Din

Volunteers for Human Rights

Maximum Territory, Minimum Population: a new report on the annexation of the West Bank through settlement, violence and the fragmentation of Palestinian space

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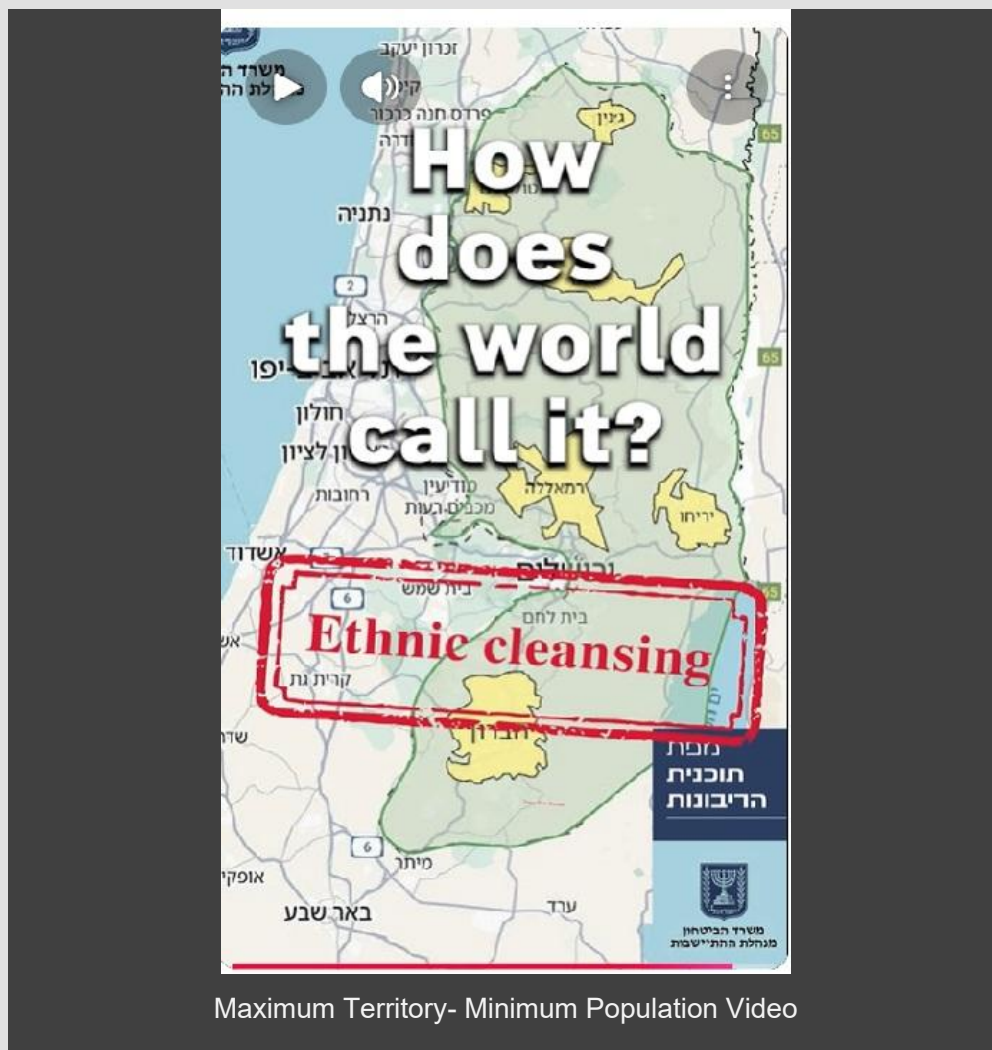
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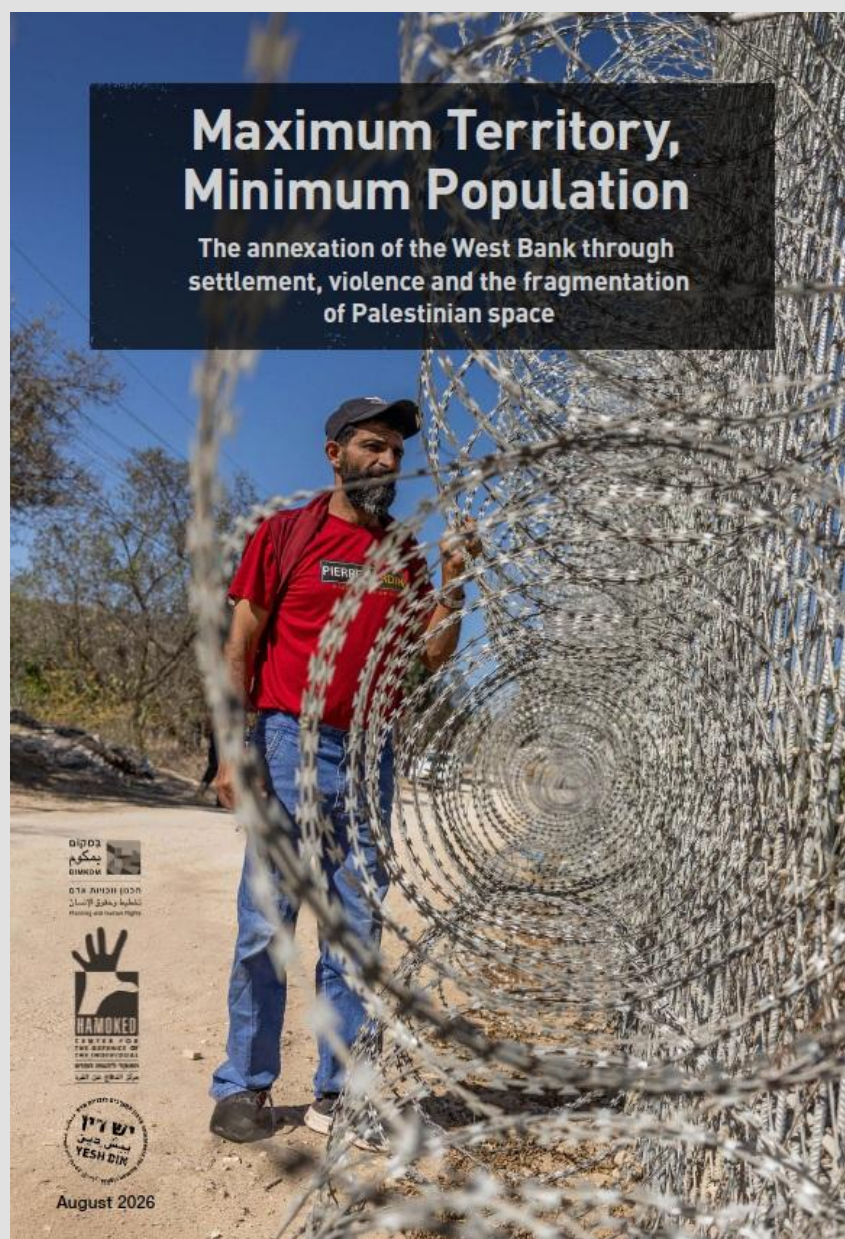
On 9 September, Yesh Din, Bimkom and HaMoked published a joint report documenting the various practices employed by Israel to forcibly displace Palestinians from their land in the West Bank. This policy, incorporated into the Israeli government's guiding principles, systematically deploys **cruel and discriminatory practices to undermine Palestinian presence and facilitate the takeover of Palestinian land**. In previous years, these practices were mostly directed at isolated communities in Area C. However, this report

demonstrates how the same apparatus is now being deployed against Palestinian communities across the West Bank.

Using four case studies that examine different levels of Palestinian social and geographic belonging—from individual families and communities to towns and entire geographic areas—the report demonstrates how Israel's annexation policy operates at different scales and in different parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).



Israel is **effectively annexing the West Bank** through a structured and coordinated policy that combines settlement expansion, violence and the fragmentation of Palestinian space. Measures initially introduced as temporary under a state of emergency have become a permanent reality, used by the State of Israel, through both soldiers and settlers, to displace Palestinian communities, push Palestinians into isolated enclaves and erode the territorial contiguity of Palestinian space, amid widespread violations of Palestinians' human rights.



The first section focuses on the Seam Zone, where access restrictions initially imposed on Palestinian landowners as an emergency measure have become a permanent reality. Upheld by Israel's High Court of Justice (HCJ), these restrictions prevent Palestinians from accessing more than 100,000 dunams of agricultural land in the West Bank, leaving the land vulnerable to takeover by the state or Israeli citizens while denying Palestinian farmers their rights to freedom of movement, property and livelihood.

The report then turns to the Bedouin community of Rummanah near Jericho, in Area A, where residents' freedom of movement is subject to the decisions of a security guard at a nearby settlement, leaving them in constant uncertainty over their ability to access healthcare, education and livelihoods. Community members also live under the constant threat of attacks, including inside their homes, as soldiers and settlers regularly enter the community. These practices demonstrate the expansion of the displacement and annexation apparatus beyond Area C and into other parts of the West Bank.

The Sinjil case study illustrates the pressures put on the town by Israel's apparatus of repression designed to drive residents off their land and concentrate them in small, enclosed areas. Direct violence, movement and access restrictions, land takeovers and systematic human rights violations are just some of the means used by the military and settlers in an ongoing process that aims to constrict Palestinian living space and create isolated Palestinian enclaves.

"Preventing a Palestinian state is an Israeli consensus... the overriding principle for applying sovereignty is maximum territory with minimum Arabs."

- Minister of Finance and a Minister in the Ministry of Defense, Bezalel Smotrich

Finally, the report looks at Palestinian space in the northern West Bank, where the military operates with lethal violence to prepare the ground for the establishment of new settlements. The rapid expansion of the settlement project in this area, which enjoys massive support from the Israeli government, has already begun changing the lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the region. It is expected to bring more restrictions on their freedom of movement and take over more of their land.

The case studies point to a structured policy comprising several interconnected components: close cooperation between **settlers**, who establish outposts and carry out violence against Palestinians, and the **military**, which systematically restricts and represses the Palestinian population, conducts large-scale operations that reshape the terrain for settlement expansion, and uses force to protect settlers; the failure of **law enforcement agencies** to effectively hold settlers and soldiers accountable; and institutional support through government funding, infrastructure, retroactive authorization and political legitimacy provided by **government ministers and elected officials**. Together, these mechanisms serve a common purpose: to expand Israeli control over West Bank land while erasing Palestinian presence from it.

This systematic apparatus seeks to realize **Israeli annexation** of the West Bank according to Minister Smotrich's declared plan of "maximum territory, minimum population": in other words, expanding Israeli control in the West Bank while fragmenting Palestinian civilian

space, emptying entire areas of Palestinian presence, isolating communities and pushing the remaining population into crowded-isolated enclaves. The forced absence of landowners from areas “**cleansed**” of Palestinians will lead to Israeli takeover of these hundreds of thousands of dunams and immeasurably exacerbate the harm inflicted on the Palestinian public in the West Bank and the human rights abuses they suffer.

Yesh Din, Bimkom and HaMoked urge the international community to take resolute, effective action, in line with international law. Israel’s unlawful annexation of the West Bank is the source of grave violations of Palestinians’ human rights and must be halted.

Israel must fulfill its legal obligation to protect Palestinians living under occupation; guarantee their fundamental rights, with an emphasis on the rights to freedom of movement, property and livelihood; remove outposts and settlements; and hold settlers and soldiers accountable for attacks on Palestinians and their property.

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We invite you to join our WhatsApp group for diplomatic updates, in which we send periodic updates on important developments in the West Bank easily and conveniently. It is a ‘silent’ group, meaning only the

administrators can post messages, and there are no conversations or debates. You are welcome to join and share the link with colleagues.

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For any enquiries, please contact Jack Munayer: jackm@yesh-din.org

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