

# Annexing the Land of Grapes and Vines:

## Israel's Annexation Policies in Al-Makhrour Valley in Bethlehem

### Key Information



- Al-Makhrour Valley is located in the Bethlehem Governorate, about 7 km south of the Old City of Jerusalem and about 6 km north-east of the Old City of Bethlehem. It is connected to other valley systems stretching from the Walaja and Cremisan valleys to the South of East Jerusalem.



- Most of the Valley is classified as Area C, and accordingly, is placed under exclusive Israeli control (civil and military).



- Al-Makhrour Valley is part of a registered UNESCO World Heritage Site for its complex irrigation system of water supply that created drywall terraces which may have been exploited in the area since antiquity.



- Besides its rich historic and cultural heritage, Al-Makhrour Valley has a great economic and agricultural value for Palestinian farmers and landowners, most of whom are Palestinian Christians, owning up more than 91 percent of the Valley.



- Rich in biodiversity and ecosystems, Al-Makhrour Valley is crucial for replenishing the water aquifer of the Bethlehem District. Freshwater springs flow through the valley, nurturing the old trees planted there.



- The Valley is the last remaining rich biodiverse open green space accessible for Palestinians in the Bethlehem Governorate due to Israel's relentless policies of land confiscation and settlement expansion inside the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).



- For its strategic location that connects Bethlehem to East Jerusalem, Al-Makhrour Valley's huge historic, cultural, and biodiversity values, as well as its economic potential are almost entirely hindered, and it remains captivated by the Israeli policies imposed on it over the past decades, notably through the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements and their related infrastructure, such as roads. The Valley has been the subject of many Israeli grab interests, pushing in favor for its annexation among other large parts of the (oPt).

### Policies & Human Rights Violations

**Settlement Enterprise:** The Valley is surrounded by Israeli settlements built and expanded illegally in the occupied Palestinian territory: Har Gilo, Gilo, Neve Daniel, Beitar Illit, and Kfar Etzion. In 2019, an outpost was established in the heart of Al-Makhrour Valley, and has been expanding since, notably after October 7th, 2023. Another new settlement "Nahal Heletz" is planned in the area and will place the Valley under additional threats of annexation.

**Land Grab Policy:** In Al-Makhrour Valley, Israel has confiscated Palestinian lands under the pretext of "public needs" to expand Road 60, serving the interests of Israeli settlements and their connectivity, simultaneously expanding settlers' populations.

**Active De-development:** Israel de-develops Palestinian agriculture and rural economy in "Area C" of the West Bank, in particular Al-Makhrour Valley, which hosts the most fertile lands, through the annexation wall, constructing settlements, confiscating lands, imposing arbitrary restrictions on farmers and hindering any potential touristic potentials.

**Demolition Policies:** With Al Makhrour's classification as Area C, and the discriminatory planning system against Palestinian planning and buildings, Israel demolishes any kind of construction; buildings, homes, agricultural infrastructure, water wells, and electricity poles.



### Alarming Developments

- Although Al-Makhrour Valley has been the subject of Israel's annexation interests and policies for decades now, Israeli authorities and settlers have taken bigger steps to secure the eventual annexation of the Valley, notably taking advantage of the global attention on the ongoing war on the Gaza Strip. Such steps mainly include:

- The accelerated expansion of the settlement that was established in the heart of the Valley in 2019.

- Israeli authorities have recently designated a jurisdictional order for the establishment of another new settlement, the "Nahal Heletz" settlement near Bethlehem,

affecting all the suburbs of the Bethlehem area but particularly Al-Makhroul Valley and its geographic connections. The decision to designate the area for the new settlement stands in stark contradiction to its conservation status, undermining the efforts to preserve this vital cultural and natural heritage. Israel prevents Palestinians from any construction in the area for 'environmental' reasons, while it actively builds new settlements and confiscates green lands, leaving the valley under an imminent threat of full confiscation and annexation.

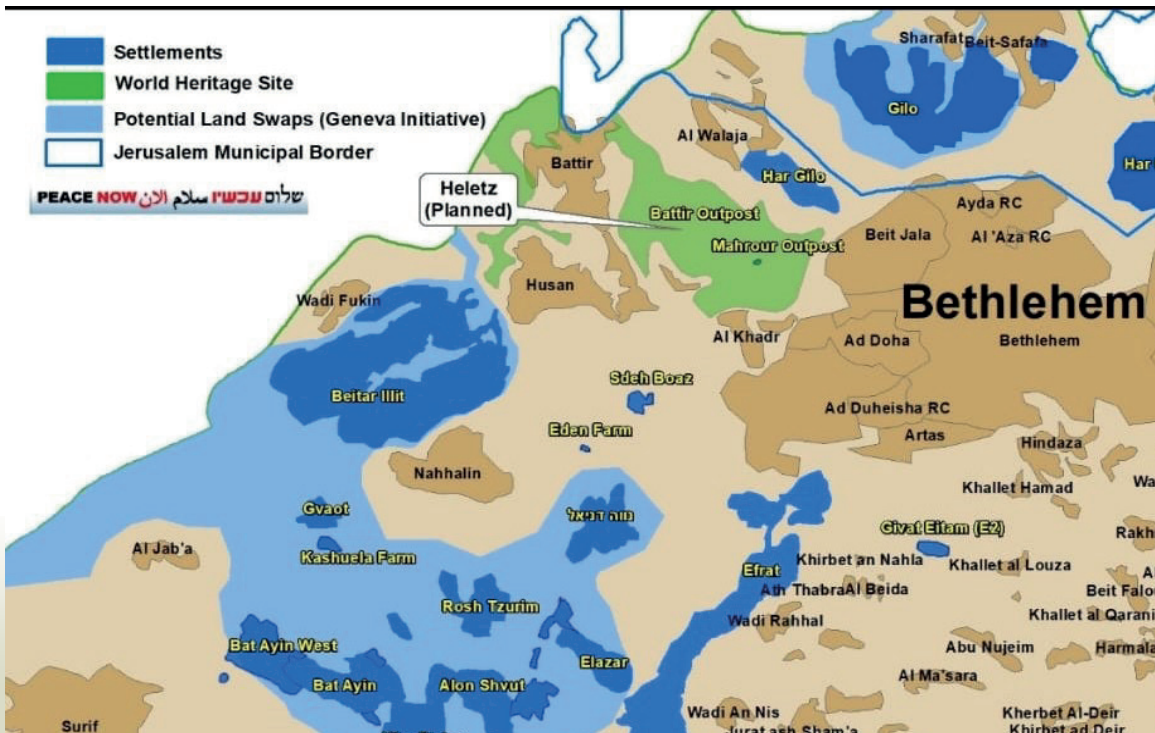
- In line with the emerging trend of settlers conducting forceful eviction across the West Bank, especially in the aftermath of 7th October 2023 and the Israel's war on the Gaza Strip, Israeli settlers forcefully evicted a family from their land in Al-Makhroul Valley, without any court eviction orders. Prior to that, Israeli authorities have demolished the same family's property and restaurant three times, and allowed for an illegal settlement to be established and expand on their demolished property.

## Specific Impacts

- Al-Makhroul Valley is the last remaining green area in the Bethlehem Governorate, and its rich cultural heritage, agricultural productivity, rich and diverse ecosystems, economic and touristic potential and local livelihoods are hindered severely due to Israeli policies governing the Valley.

- Since Palestinian development and access to the Al-Makhroul area is already restricted due to Israeli policies, annexing the Valley will enable a mass process of land grab and expansion of Israeli infrastructure, eliminating the already fragile Palestinian presence. Accordingly, the western Bethlehem area, including the entirety of Al-Makhroul Valley, would become a reservoir for further Israeli settlement expansion, in population and infrastructure. The planned annexation of the Valley would also cripple all Palestinian agricultural activities and tourism potentials.

- Over 91% of the valley belongs to Palestinian Christians. The dispossession of their lands is alarming and is linked with the already dwindling numbers of Palestinian Christians.



## International Law

- Israeli policies in Al-Makhroul Valley including the illegal settlements policy and its associated infrastructure, the systematic land grab, the illegal exploitation resources, the discrimination against Palestinians, the deliberate hindering of the right to self-determination and the right to development, and annexation are manifestly illegal under international law, including International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Human Rights Law (IHRL), and International Criminal Law (ICL).

- The absolute prohibition on annexation/territorial acquisition with the application of domestic law into occupied territory, as a manifestation of the use of force and violation of the right to self-determination, is an erga omnes obligation under international law, and must be absolutely respected.

To learn more about the annexation of Al-Makhroul Valley, read the Report titled "Annexing the Land of Grapes and Vines: Case Study of Al Makhroul Valley" prepared by the Balasan Initiative for Human Rights (BIHR) and watch the short movie: "The Land of Olives and Vines: Our Heritage, Our Future – Al Makhroul Valley".



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Short Movie



Report

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