MONDAY, SEPT 21: PALESTINIAN CHILDREN FROM THREATENED VILLAGE OF SUSIYA TO ADDRESS MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

House Briefing to Safeguard Palestinian Villages of Susiya, Umm al Kheir

Children to present ‘Pinwheels for Peace’ on International Peace Day, Sept. 21st

Burlingame, CA – Palestinians from the West Bank villages of Susiya and Umm al Kheir, which are under threat of destruction by the Israeli government, will address members of Congress during a lunchtime briefing on International Peace Day, September 21. The delegation will include children and parents who will talk about Susiya’s plight, which is shared by thousands of other Palestinians both inside Israel and in the occupied territories whose homes are threatened with destruction by Israeli authorities. An Israeli member of Villages Group will explain why Israeli policy must change. The children will also share their visions of peace for the future as they present Pinwheels for Peace to members of Congress throughout the week. Sponsored by the American nonprofit, Rebuilding Alliance, the briefing will take place on Monday Sept. 21 at noon in B354 in the Rayburn House Office Building room, located on Independence Avenue between First Street SW and South Capitol Street in Washington DC, and is open to the public.

“Just before I was born, my family was forced from our homes in 1986, even though we have clear title to our land,” said Fatma Nawaje, founder and Executive Director of the Rural Women’s Association of...
the South Hebron Hills. “We ask Americans to hear our story and urge their members of Congress to press Israel to recognize our right to plan our future on the land we own.”

The Palestinian village of Susiya, located near the city of Hebron in the south of the occupied West Bank, is currently home to 55 families who hold title to their land. Half of the homes in Susiya and all of the community’s public structures are located in Area C where, according to the Oslo Accords, Israel was to hold temporary control over planning and zoning. In 2013, Susiya submitted a professionally developed master plan to Israel’s occupation authorities, who rejected it arguing that the villagers would be better off living somewhere else. With the help of the non-governmental organization Rabbis for Human Rights, the villagers petitioned the High Court of Israel to allow reconsideration of their master plan. Negotiations with the Israeli army are now underway.

“It is not enough for Congress to speak against the expansion of Israeli settlements,” said David Massey, an Israeli member of Villages Group who visits these villages weekly. “We want U.S. policy-makers to hear for themselves so that they will understand what is happening in Susiya and Umm Al Kheir and take action to keep the villages standing.”

It is nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain permits from Israeli authorities to build in Area C, part of Israel’s policy of restricting the growth of Palestinian population centers there while expanding Israeli settlements on Palestinian land. According to a new UN report, Under Threat: Demolition Orders in Area C of the West Bank, the Israeli Army’s Civil Administration has over 13,000 demolition orders currently pending against Palestinian homes, schools, barns, and water cisterns.

“The British, French and Belgians have funded a remarkable program to help Palestinian villages create zoning plans just like any other town,” said Donna Baranski-Walker, Executive Director of Rebuilding Alliance. “We’re especially concerned because on June 9th the High Court of Israel denied the right of Palestinian villages in the West Bank's Area C to plan their own communities, leaving all decisions on zoning and planning to Israeli occupation authorities, with no direct Palestinian representation when it comes to the future of their towns. Palestinians are being denied building permits and issued demolition orders without any way to stop this. However, one thing worked: Calls from Congress kept the village of Al Aqaba standing. This summer, the outcry for Susiya, including from members of Congress, stopped the Israeli Army from demolishing their village in July. If anyone can convince Israel to stop the bulldozers and recognize Susiya’s zoning plan, Congress can — and Congress will do this because constituents ask.”

Rebuilding Alliance is dedicated to rebuilding war-torn communities and bringing the world together to make them safe. Visit our website here for more information.