

SACD | Analysys

May 2020

Demolitions in Harasta strip displaced Syrians of property, cement regime's project of demographic change

Demolitions in Harasta strip displaced Syrians of property, cement regime's project of demographic change

The regime's forces continue with demolitions of private property belonging to displaced Syrians. The units of the regime's Fourth Division, using heavy machinery and bulldozers, several days ago demolished dozens of houses in the city of Harasta in Eastern Ghouta.

While more than 50 homes were being demolished, Assad's military set up checkpoints which prevented the residents from entering their homes and lands, despite obtaining security clearances earlier.

The people in the area are convinced that this action is a continuation of property seizures under the notorious Law 10, which was used to strip the displaced Syrians of their homes previously in the adjacent neighbourhoods like Qaboun, Tishreen, and Barza.

The city of Harasta is divided into two parts, east and west, separated by the Damascus – Homs highway and the western area is considered the agricultural region of the city. It was closed off by the regime in May 2017 after the area was conquered by Assad's forces, but the people displaced from there were allowed to visit their homes and work the land under the "reconciliation agreement" and special daily security clearances. However, the regime continued with demolitions throughout this time under the pretext of clearing uninhabitable houses and underground tunnels. Owners and residents were forbidden from returning to their properties.

Now, the closure has become permanent and demolitions have intensified. Assad's militias stationed at the entrance of Qaboun issued orders preventing the people of the area from entering their neighborhoods permanently, according to instructions received by officers from the Fourth Division. The reason: Law 10 and the plan to appropriate the area in favour of a businessman close to the regime known as Mohamed Hamsho, who apparently plans to build in the area under the provisions of Law 10 which enabled similar confiscation of people's property for development projects.

May 2020

Demolitions in Harasta strip displaced Syrians of property, cement regime's project of demographic change

The Law 10, promulgated by the regime in 2018 under the guise of reconstruction and promoted as an 'urban planning measure' for areas destroyed in the war, essentially strips a majority of displaced people of property ownership due to administrative and legal obstacles it imposes in the process of "re-organising" the status of the properties that they own.

Even if they still possess ownership documents of their property, the law ensures that they cannot renovate or rebuild in areas designated for "re-organisation".

The prohibitive nature of the law ensures that Syrians are prevented from the reconstruction or restoration of their homes unless granted permission by authorities. These are the same authorities who have issued a decree to "re-organise" the region which annuls the right of the rightful owners to sell, buy, mortgage, obtain construction and restoration permits.

The way the law works is that a property owner must first submit an objection, within a year, and then dare to appear before the competent authorities and obtain security approvals, or send a relative to undertake this adventure.

Approaching security services to obtain such approvals entails a genuine risk to the life of the owner considering that so many refugees and displaced people were pro-opposition. The fact is that in most of the areas from which people have been displaced, a return is not allowed and that most people have no relatives there who can act on their behalf.

Property owners whose hopes focus on "once again having a peaceful life in Syria" will likely discover that their property has been lost, or has dramatically shrunk and that they cannot reclaim it. Those trying to return will find out that the situation has changed drastically in favour of the regime and Syria's discriminatory legal framework renders the return of a huge number of Syrians nearly impossible.

Harasta is just the latest example of the regime's obvious intent to prevent the return of displaced Syrians and affect a permanent demographic change. Such actions are the primary reason for the sanctions from the European Union and the United States, which are now being extended to all those involved in such

SACD | Analysys

May 2020

Demolitions in Harasta strip displaced Syrians of property, cement regime's project of demographic change

dealings with the regime, including Syrian but also international entities and individuals. Syrians, especially those living under the regime, must accept that the sanctions cannot be lifted nor can a sustainable political solution for Syria be reached until the discriminatory acts of the regime, such as the implementation of the Law 10, are stopped and abolished, and the rights of displaced Syrians are upheld in their totality, including the ownership of their property.



Syrian Association for
CITIZENS' DIGNITY

SACD is a civil rights popular movement established by Syrians for Syrians. It works to promote, protect and secure the rights of displaced Syrians.

✉ info@syacd.org
f [SYrianACD](#)