

[Culture](#)



In "No Other Land," Palestinian activist and co-director Basel Adra chronicles the destruction of a Palestinian village in Masafer Yatta, a community struggling to survive and fighting for its basic rights in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. (Dogwoof)



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February 27, 2025

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Basel Adra recalls his first memory: His father, a gas station owner named Nasser, getting arrested by Israeli forces for protesting its occupation of Palestine. Adra was 5 years old. Two decades later, at age 28, Adra is a Palestinian activist and filmmaker chronicling the destruction of property and forced displacement of Palestinian villagers in Masafer Yatta, a community struggling to survive and fighting for its basic rights in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

An essential historical document that informs and infuriates in equal measure, "No Other Land," an Oscar-nominated documentary available on AppleTV, Amazon Prime and other streaming services, depicts Israeli forces bulldozing schools, leveling homes, evicting families and [shooting a Palestinian villager](#) after attempting to snatch his building tools.

The film centers on the unlikely partnership between Adra, who lives in Masafer Yatta with his family, and Israeli journalist Yuval Abraham, who arrives there to investigate the expulsions being perpetrated "in his name." Co-directed by Adra, Abraham, Hamdan Ballal and Rachel Szor, this vital documentary is both a political rallying cry and an appeal to our basic humanity. Its scenes irritate the conscience, cutting through the noise of policy debates to portray a community on the brink, families menaced by the threat of expulsion and dispossession.

The film depicts Israeli operations in Masafer Yatta from the summer of 2019 to immediately before the [massacre](#) on Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas terrorists slaughtered more than 1,200 Israeli civilians. In documenting the destruction of Masafer Yatta, Adra hoped his work may help encourage the United States to place pressure on Israel. (Of course, this was before President Donald Trump's second term.)



Palestinian activist Basel Adra, left, and Israeli journalist Yuval Abraham in the Oscar-nominated documentary "No Other Land" (Dogwoof)

We watch as Palestinians lose their homes and livelihoods in real time while the Israeli forces follow orders. Schoolchildren escape out a window before their classroom is flattened. Israeli forces disable a water well, allegedly built without a permit, by clogging it with cement. After their home is destroyed, a family — a mother with her kids — retreat to a cave and eat a bag of bread for dinner. "They made us strangers in our own land," says one Palestinian man.

Situated among the South Hebron Hills in the lower West Bank, Masafer Yatta spans a dozen villages and more than 30,000 dunams of land (approximately 7,400 acres). As of 2022, the area was home to [about 1,150 Palestinian villagers](#), nearly half of whom were children.

The West Bank has been under Israeli occupation since the Six-Day War in 1967. And in the early 1980s, Israel declared the South Hebron Hills region a "[firing zone](#)" — designated as Firing Zones 917 and 918 — to be used for military training by the Israel Defense Forces. The firing zone designation allowed Israel to begin the mass expulsion of Palestinians from the villages.

In 1995, the [Oslo II Accord](#), an interim agreement between Israel and Palestine, divided the West Bank into three administrative sections: Areas A, B and C. The first two areas were established under limited Palestinian control, while Area C, which includes Masafer Yatta and nearly two-thirds of the West Bank, is administered by Israel.

The accords set forth an expectation for land in Area C to be "gradually transferred to Palestinian jurisdiction," but the area remains under Israeli control. These land divisions created a complicated "[Swiss cheese map](#)," restricting Palestinians to scattered, disconnected enclaves throughout the West Bank.

In May 2022, after a protracted legal battle that began in the 1980s, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that Israeli forces [could evict Palestinian civilians](#) from Masafer Yatta, describing the firing zone as "essential for military and security needs." The court's opinion states that, prior to the establishment of the firing zone, "there was no permanent habitation within its boundaries," allowing for the forcible transfer of Palestinians under Israeli law.

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The Israel-led demolition of schools, homes and other infrastructure in Masafer Yatta [has accelerated](#) following the ruling.

Samer Daoudi is the programs and advocacy coordinator for the [Society of St. Yves](#), a Jerusalem-based Catholic human rights organization founded by the former Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah in 1991. (Sabbah was born in Palestine, then under British rule.) The society provides pro-bono legal aid for Palestinians living in Masafer Yatta, and most legal cases there are aimed at stopping demolition orders.

Speaking from Jerusalem, Daoudi recounted an [incident](#) in June 2022, one month after the Supreme Court ruling, when Israeli soldiers detained society staff in Masafer Yatta for four hours and confiscated their car and phones. Daoudi says that staff were made to sign a document banning them from Masafer Yatta for three years, although they still conduct work there today.

According to Daoudi, nearly all the houses in Masafer Yatta face demolition orders. He said the society currently handles more than 2,700 demolition cases in the West Bank; last year, the organization took on an additional 274 cases. The group has

been successful in preventing the destruction of some "older homes," but Daoudi says that structures located near roads and settlements are specifically targeted for demolition.

"Anything put in Area C needs a permit, and obtaining a permit is nearly impossible," said Daoudi in an interview with NCR. In many cases, filing a suit to stop a demolition will prevent it for some time, but that is not a perfect method. "Strategically, it's just buying time, honestly," he said.

On Feb. 10 this year, the military reportedly [demolished seven homes](#) and left 54 people, including 28 children, unsheltered. "As the world watches 'No Other Land,' Israeli settlers are raiding and burning our villages while soldiers arrest us, abuse us and demolish our homes," [observes](#) co-director Adra.