

CASE STUDY 12

Noam and Tehila

Noam and Tehila Cohen live in Neve Erez, a small Israeli settlement known as an 'outpost' in the West Bank. It is about an hour from Jerusalem by car. Many settlers are religious, but Noam and Tehila are secular Jews. Unlike bigger settlements, which are more like towns, the Cohens live in caravans and tents on the hilltop.

All settlements are viewed as illegal under international law, but Neve Erez is also illegal under Israeli law because it is partly built on Palestinian-owned land. The Israel Defense Forces removed the settlers in 2001, but they returned.

The Cohens met and married in Israel, but their parents were among 120,000 Iraqi Jews who fled to Israel from Iraq when antisemitic persecution increased after the 1948 war. Tehila grew up in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv in a left-wing household that disapproved of settlements, but she changed her mind when she was older.

**“Why shouldn’t we live here?
This is our homeland.”**

Tehila Cohen

Noam says, “I can partly understand the Palestinian claim on the land... I love this place and I’ve only been here 14 years. What’s it going to do to someone who has lived here for 50 years or 100 years? ...But fortunately I am not a Palestinian. I am a Jewish person and I base my claim on 2,000 or 3,000 years of history.”

The settlers in Neve Erez farm crops including pomegranates and carob.

As well as working the land, Noam is a musician.

“I came here partly for selfish reasons. I wanted to become self-sufficient somewhere remote. But also this is a community with an agenda. Everyone here has to love the Jewish tradition and want to be part of our homeland.”



Neve Erez settlement in the distance.



Noam and Tehila Cohen, settlers from Neve Erez.

**“If you’re Jewish, and
you’re connected to your
Jewishness, you must feel very
connected to the land here.”**

Tehila Cohen

CASE STUDY 12

Illegal under international law?

Israeli settlements are described as illegal under international law because Israel is moving people into territory it occupied in war.

Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war states:

“The occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own population into the territories it occupies.”

The Israeli government says the law does not apply because there was no nation of Palestine before they took control. Some new settlements built without government permission are dismantled, but sometimes it has changed its mind and let the settlers stay.



“We are the most demonised group of people in the world. Everybody talks about us, but nobody wants to talk to us.”

Dani Dayan, chief foreign envoy for Yesha Council, the settler umbrella organisation, quoted by the *Telegraph* newspaper.

Violence and human rights abuses

The settlements and the violent behaviour of some settlers cause human rights problems for Palestinians.

There are 2.8 million Palestinians in the West Bank. Some of them live near settlements that have been built on their land and next to their homes. Conflict over land, water and road use are common. Sometimes armed settlers attack Palestinians, invading farmland and villages. Settlers are also targeted by Palestinian militants (see Resource 32). There is a high density of settlements in and around the largely Palestinian East Jerusalem, making that a tense area.



The future of settlements

Although Israel has twice removed settlements in the past, from the Sinai in the 1980s and from Gaza in 2005, the government has increasingly supported settlements with new laws.

Settlement expansion has frustrated Palestinians because it reduces the amount of land and the viability of a future Palestinian state.



Video: Israeli settlers in Gaza before the 2005 withdrawal.

Case study compiled with information from the *Telegraph* and B'Tselem.