

## [Olive Trees destroyed in Jaba'a](#)

The random destruction of olive groves by the Israeli Occupation Forces in the West Bank continues. Last Tuesday, February 22nd 2011 Izzat Abu latifa, a farmer from [Jab'a](#) near Bethlehem was among the latest group of Palestinian farmers to suffer the loss of olive trees destroyed by the Israelis.

Around 7am, the Israelis came to the field adjacent to the Israeli [bypass road](#) 367. They started cutting down the trees with chainsaws and then poisoned the roots. When Izzat was told that Israelis were on his land, he hurried to the scene to find nearly 150 olive trees cut down and piled up under the supervision of the military contingent. They told him that the trees were being uprooted because they were planted on Israeli state land. However the field is located just outside of the residential area of Jab'a and it is in the Occupied West Bank and not in Israel. Izzat proved his ownership by showing the Israeli commander his land title.

Izzat told members of the Joint Advocacy Initiative "when I saw them cutting down the trees I felt as if my heart was being uprooted from between my lungs" He added that he had been growing olives on his land for 40 years. "I planted every year as many trees as I could manage and now they come to destroy what I have been working on. Olive trees are holy; what faith, what religion allows this to happen. How does any human being have the heart to kill trees like this"

Izzat was evidently grief-stricken at the loss of the trees which were between 40 and 2 years old and planted by him, his children and grand children. The outrage was made worse by threats from the Israeli commander that if Izzat didn't remove the cut-down trees from the field immediately the Israelis would destroy his remaining trees.

When JAI members attended the scene on Wednesday the trunks and branches were stacked in front of his house in the village with most of the stumps still visible across the terraced fields. It is believed the Israeli actions were motivated in pursuit of the policy to plant pine trees along road corridors and they had been deliberately negligent in not checking the ownership of the land.

A claim for damages will now be made as well as complaints to the various authorities although Izzat's true loss and the injury he feels can never be made good. He is not a young man, yet despite this he is determined to replant the fields as soon as he can to ensure his link with the land and its olive heritage is maintained.

His spirit is inspirational to JAI members who will endeavour to help him with resources and labour from the international community who support the organization's efforts to protect the olive groves from Israeli settlers and the forces of the occupation.

Unfortunately the losses were not confined to Izzat. The Israelis left his land and went down to destroy another 120 olive trees belonging to Mohammed Ahmed Abu Sbeha who wasn't in the village at the time and came to his field when it was too late. The 120 olive trees were given to Mohammed through the Olive Tree Campaign in its 7th and 8th seasons and were sponsored by people from Japan, Netherlands, Norway, The UK and The USA.

*Note:*

Both Izzat and Mohammed have been part of JAI's Olive Tree Campaign which is called Keep Hope Alive. While Mohammed received olive trees, Izzat became a good example for other farmers because of his lifelong service to his land and his olive trees. Three years ago the Israeli Military came to Izzat's land with the Israeli Water Authority and destroyed part of his land to install water tubes through which Israel could deplete West Bank water for pumping into Israel. Izzat was prevented from having access to the water and was left with the destroyed part of his field which he has since tried to repair. Today he faces a similar act of destruction implemented not for the theft of water but because someone in Israel has decided that pine trees should replace his olive trees on his land!

*Suggested actions:*

- Write a letter to your country's representative in Tel Aviv, asking for a visit to the destroyed fields and affected farmers. Contacts to the farmers can be

made available after contacting the Olive Tree Campaign  
at [olivetree@jai-pal.org](mailto:olivetree@jai-pal.org).

- Write a private and/ or public (through news papers) letter to the Israeli representatives in your country, sharing the story of the farmers and seeking explanation for what happened, and find out if there is a way to bring those responsible for the destruction to justice.
- Write a letter of support to the farmers to let them know they are not left on their own in watching their livelihoods being destroyed.
- Try to bring this story to light using your local newspapers, radio, TV stations or any other media tools to bring the story to light.
- Sponsor an olive tree or call on your friends and other people you know to sponsor olive trees to be planted in fields that suffer the same type of risks.