

## **Illegal Houses Torn Down**

**Author:** [Abdul Wali](#)

The authorities are trying to clear the capital of hundreds of homes that don't square with Kabul development plans.

A newly-formed militia is knocking down hundreds of houses illegally built by Kabul's homeless on wasteland in the mountains north of the capital.

The force - made up of defence ministry soldiers, police and municipal workers - began to destroy around 400 homes on October 6 because they don't fit into an urban development plan drawn up thirty years ago to guide the city's expansion.

But no sooner are the houses destroyed than their former occupants try to rebuild them.

"We knocked the illegal houses down, but their owners have started to rebuild them secretly during the night," Sayed Noor Aqa, deputy chairman of properties for the Kabul municipality, told IWPR.

The housing demolition is focused on the northern district of Khaikhana Kotal, an area of wasteland where hundreds of makeshift houses were erected over the last decade or so.

One of the victims of the demolitions, Mohammad Haidar, a cook in the central military headquarters, told IWPR that he had recently built a house because he never made enough money to buy a property in 27 years of living the city.

"I had started building a house for myself, but the municipality damaged it a few days ago," he said. "I am going to wait and see what my neighbours want to do. If they start to rebuild their homes, I will do the same."

Many Kabulis believe that if someone builds a house here, the authorities do not have the right to knock it down.

Under communist-era legislation, if a building is built to a certain height it cannot be demolished. But the authorities argue that the law is being abused. "People are putting up houses all over Kabul - even in parks," said one official.

The urban plan was first drawn up in the early Sixties to monitor and control the capital's growth. The Soviet-backed government started their own programme - which included the construction of the Microrayon neighbourhood, a huge modern housing estate.

Since then, the dreadful cycle of war and instability has left whole districts of the city uninhabitable, while a large number of returning refugees have stretched Kabul's resources to breaking point.

According to statistics from the United Nations High Council for Refugees, UNHCR, more than 1,700,000

displaced Afghans have come home this year so far. Almost half a million have headed for the capital, which has put pressure on an already desperate housing situation.

The few homes that are available for rent are far too expensive for the returning refugees, who are forced to live in bombed-out buildings and other dangerous areas.

Efforts are now being made to address the problem, with the municipality preparing to distribute 50,000 plots of land to the most needy refugees.

Sixteen projects are underway, but they will not help those who have been rendered homeless by the new task force. "The municipality will not distribute land to those who have built illegal houses," said a local official.

Many of those building illegally have links to the former armed groups who successfully fought against the Taliban. "They feel they have earned the right to build a house anywhere," said Gul Mohammad, who lives in Hazara Baghal.

But others are simply looking for a way to get through Afghanistan's bitter winter. Bicycle mechanic Fazil Bari, who has built a three-roomed mud house on a hill, said, "I did not have a home, so I decided to build a simple home here. It's the only way I can save my family from the cold weather."

Abul Wali is a Kabul-based freelance journalist

**Focus:** [Afghanistan](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/illegal-houses-torn-down>