



Israeli Settler Violations in Area C

February 2023

The Jordan Valley, constitutes of almost 30% of the West Bank, home for about 65,000 Palestinians and 11,000 settlers, 90% of this area is located in Area C, under full Israeli control. The Jordan Valley has many open and undeveloped areas. This makes it the largest land reserve for development in the West Bank. However, the Israeli occupation exploits this area for their own advantage, and uses false pretexts to ensure that Palestinians do not enter or use the area. Palestinians, specifically in Area C and especially in the Jordan Valley, face continuous attacks and violations from Israeli citizens (settlers) and Israeli armed forces., in breach of International Law. The Through its work on the ground, Palestinian Farmers Union has collected information on these violations and their real-life impact. This monthly brief highlights Israeli violations and brings to light the real struggle on the ground for Palestinians in the Jordan Valley and Area C and the long-lasting impact they will have on them and their families.

Huwara Under Attack and Nobody Is Coming to Help

As regular readers of this monthly update may already know, Israeli settler attacks on Palestinian civilians are on the rise. However, few could have predicted how deadly this year has already proven to be. Thirty-five Palestinians were killed in January 2023 alone, coinciding with the first month of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's sixth government. The Palestinian deaths that occurred in January 2023 reflect a dramatic escalation of settler violence, following a year that was already deemed the deadliest year for Palestinians since 2005. In 2022, the average fatality rate was 13 Palestinians per month (Local Call and +972, 2023). This year is starting off with an average that is almost triple the fatality rate of 2022, with more than one Palestinian killed every day (Local Call and +972, 2023). Out of the 35 Palestinians that were killed in January 2023, 25 were killed during Israeli military raid in areas A (fully under Palestinian control) and B (partially under Palestinian control) of the West Bank. In many cases, innocent civilians who were uninvolved in the conflicts between militants and soldiers were killed, with no evidence to prove that most of the civilians who were killed were shooting at Israeli occupation soldiers. As a result, most of the deaths were the result of military activities initiated by Israel, rather than the result of active attempts to harm Israelis (Local Call and +972, 2023).

On the heels of an already very deadly start to the new year, on February 22, 2023, an additional 11 Palestinians were killed (bringing the total death toll for 2023 to 56) and more than 100 Palestinians were wounded during an Israeli military raid in Nablus. The Israeli raid occurred in the early hours of the morning, as Palestinians were getting ready to start their day. The Israeli occupation military justified the raid, starting they were targeting to member of the Lion's Den armed group and a member of the Islamic Jihad group who they suspected were carrying out attacks in the West Bank. During the raid, a gunfight and intense clashes occurred, with innocent civilians being attacked with live ammunition. The deadly Israeli operation has added fuel to the fire, as tensions escalate in the region.

On February 27, 2023, less than a week after the deadly Israeli raid in Nablus, with all eyes on the region, approximately 400 Israeli settlers set dozens of Palestinian homes and cars on fire in Huwara, a town in the occupied West Bank city of Nablus, after two Israeli settlers were killed. The attack on the town of Huwara appears to be the worst outburst of settler violence in decades. Palestinian media stated that 30 homes and cars were set on fire during the rampage, one man was shot and killed, two others were shot and wounded, one man was stabbed, and a fourth man was beaten with an iron bar in addition to 95 civilians who were treated for tear gas inhalation.

As the world stood by and watched in shock as the attacks unfolded in Huwara, hundreds of Palestinian civilians lost everything. The residents of Huwara watched in horror as their town was attacked under the protection of Israeli occupation army, with feelings of hopelessness as they knew that nobody was coming to help them. All they could do was defend their town with the rocks they picked up from the ground against a large group of settlers who had a vast array of weaponry and were intent on causing harm.

PFU has reached out to the mayor of Huwara, Mr. Mu'in Dimedi, who says that the attacks on Huwara have become more brutal from May 2022 until now, with the Israeli occupation closing roads in the town and isolating it, which prevents citizens, especially patients, from reaching the city for treatment. It does not help that the town is surrounded by four large settlements and an army camp, including Yitzhar, Bracha, Itamar, and Alon Moreh, and all the mentioned settlements pass right through the town of Huwara. Speaking about the night of the attack, Mr. Dimedi, with sorrow in voice, said that the attacks continued until midnight and resulted in the injury of 390 innocent citizens with gunfire and suffocation with tear gas. Additionally, seven houses, six car garages, and 34 private cars were burned down and 25 houses and 20 cars had their glass shattered.



A dove of peace killed in the town of Huwara during the vicious attacks of Israeli settlers

The mayor also mentioned that three ambulances and a civil defense vehicle was pelted with rocks in an attempt to prevent them from reaching and helping the injured as well as extinguish fires. It was clear that the Israeli settlers meant to do harm and messages such as "Israel should 'wipe out' Palestinian town of Huwara" as recently stated by Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, only escalate the tensions in an already tense region.

Ziad Ahmed Ghaleb Al Dimidi, a farmer and father of four, spoke to PFU about what he witnessed on the night of the raid. Mr. Ziad, who was still in shock about the events that unfolded, said, "The day started like any other day. I went to go work on my land and came home around 4 PM and my family and I all ate lunch together. We had just sat down in the living room to watch TV when around 6 PM, my children came in screaming that there are people shouting and they heard the sounds of gunshots and glass breaking. I got up in a panic, not knowing what was happening. We are all still on edge from the raid that happened in Nablus last week, and I thought that maybe a raid was happening in our town too. I grabbed my children and yelled for my wife and we all hid in

one room. My children were crying, they had no idea what was happening. I tried to calm them down but it was hard considering neither my wife or I knew exactly what was happening. I felt hopeless because there was nothing I could defend my family with. I knew, deep down, that if anyone entered our home, they could kill us without any consequences." This has become the general feeling in the West Bank. We often hear sentiments such as, "why are our lives so cheap to them?", "why won't anyone help us?". Palestinians are tired of the international community offering their sentiments and condemning the actions of the Israeli occupation government without action.

Mr. Ziad continued, "I opened the news on my phone, and realized that this was not a raid, but an attack by Israeli settlers. I could feel my heart sink because I know that Israeli settlers are ruthless, they kill without remorse and they do not see Palestinians as people. A few minutes later, I heard our door break and our windows in the living room shatter. My children were now screaming and crying, I will never forget the fear on their faces. My wife was trying to calm them down, but I knew she was just as afraid as they were. Then we hear the crackling sound of flames. It was a sound I will never forget; it haunts me. I realized, to my horror, that they had set the house on fire, knowing that my family and I were inside the house. I quickly got up to assess the situation, I ran outside to see if it was safe for my family and I to leave the house, but I found that the settlers had surrounded the house from every angle. We would not escape alive. However, if we stayed in the house we would burn or suffocate from the smoke. I ran back inside, and found my wife holding my children close. I will never forget the fear in their eyes, my wife did not speak a single word. She had lost all hope



of escaping the attack alive. I then told my wife and my children that we had to get to the roof. Then, we all ran to the roof of the house, and waited there for approximately two hours until the ambulances arrived. My family and I have not slept since that night. My children wake up screaming, afraid that they will be burned alive. My wife and I jump at any little noise. It was a miracle that we survived, Allah was with us that night and protected my family and I. We are thankful that we are alive, but I am now worried because we have lost everything. The settlers burned down my entire house, a house that is full of beautiful memories is now gone. Some of our family members have graciously taken us in but, as we all know, nothing can replace the security of your own home. They also chopped down 25 fruit trees and killed the sheep and chickens that I relied on to make an income and secure the basic needs of my family. I do not know how I am going to make a living now. Our house was burned down with all our belongings in it, including money and jewelry that we were hiding in the house. I am also extremely worried about the psychological state of my children. They, like so many other Palestinian children, have witnessed so much trauma in their lives, I do not know how they will recover. When they were younger, they used to ask questions like 'why do they hate us so much?' and 'why do they want to kill us?' They do not ask these questions anymore; they have just come to accept our reality for what it is."

Mr. Ziad, despite the difficult situation that he and his family endured, concluded with this, "The Palestinian people are resilient and rooted like olive trees. One day, the Israeli occupation will disappear and we will be free. My story is just one of the many examples of the daily life of Palestinians who live under oppression and tyranny from an occupation that does not see them as people. We should have lost all hope by now, but we continue to defend our right to exist until the very end."



Out of fear, a child leaves his bike to be burned by Israeli settlers

Ziad's story is one of many that sheds a light on the realities of living under occupation. PFU asks you, the reader, this question: Is it not the right of any person to live without the fear that their lives will be taken away from them at any second? Should those who use violence on innocent civilians be held accountable for their actions? Why is it that the world watches from a far when crimes against humanity are being conducted every day on Palestinian land? Is it not time to stand up and say to not only Huwara, but the many towns just like it, that help is coming?