



## **Who are the Israeli settlers and what is settler terrorism?**

Settlers are a community of Jewish Israelis who illegally expropriate and “settle” land in territory militarily occupied by Israel, including the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan. The reasons for this settlement are predominantly ideological, religious or economic. Ideologically driven settlers seek to strengthen Israel’s administrative standing in these occupied territories under the auspices of military and security needs. Religiously motivated Israelis become settlers to fulfill what they understand as a God-given right to reclaim the Biblical borders of the state of Israel.<sup>1</sup> Economically driven settlers are motivated by the greater affordability of homes in Israeli settlements.<sup>2</sup> In 2022, Israel’s settler population almost reached half a million people in the West Bank and around 330,000 in East Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> According to Art. 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, all of these settlements are illegal, and constitute a war crime under international law.<sup>4</sup>

According to the latest figures from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, UN), 2022 recorded the highest number of acts of settler-related violence since monitoring started in 2006.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Israeli settler violence against Palestinians civilians has been a long-standing practice to intimidate and drive Palestinians from their land. The Jewish Underground’s bombing campaigns against Palestinian mayors in 1980, and the Baruch Goldstein attack on Al-Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron in 1994 are among the earliest and most notable examples of settler violence.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, violent Israeli settler activity has become commonplace in the West bank and East Jerusalem. Attacks vary and take many different forms: physical violence; shooting with live ammunition; torching of fields and livestock; theft and vandalization of property, trees and crops; stone-throwing; and repeated intimidation of herders and their families.<sup>7</sup> Because this violence has a political aim, it constitutes a form of terrorism committed by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians.

## **What enables Israeli settler terrorism?**

Israeli settler terrorism is enabled because of the legal structure of Israel’s occupation and the collusion of state institutions. The majority of settler terrorism occurs in

Areas B and C of the West Bank where the Israeli police and the Israeli military alone are responsible for security.<sup>8</sup> Palestinian police on the other hand, only have limited jurisdiction in Area B and none in area C. The legal protocol of the Oslo Accords – which established these jurisdictions – stipulates that Israel has sole criminal jurisdiction over offenses committed by Israelis settlers in the occupied territories.<sup>9</sup> Settlers who choose to carry out attacks in areas B and C, where the vast majority of attacks occur, know full well that the Israeli criminal justice system alone is responsible for any prosecution. Since the Israeli justice system rarely prosecutes Israelis involved in settler violence, settlers have little fear of legal consequences.<sup>10</sup>

According to Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organization, 93 percent of investigations into settler attacks against Palestinians between 2005 and 2022 were closed by the Israeli authorities with no charges filed.<sup>11</sup> Worse, settler violence is often actually enabled by the Israeli army. Indeed, although soldiers have the authority and duty to arrest settler carrying out criminal acts, the military avoids confronting them as a matter of policy.<sup>12</sup> Instead, during confrontations provoked by Israeli settlers, it often opts to force Palestinians from their own farms or pastures. Sometimes, it does this through discriminatory or violent strategies include using tear gas, stun grenades, rubber-coated metal bullets, and even live ammunition. Sometimes, soldiers even actively participate in the settler attacks or refuse to intervene.<sup>13</sup> According to a report by Israeli human rights group B’Tselem, in a broad sense, the Israeli state “fully supports and assists” acts of settler violence against Palestinians.<sup>14</sup> The same report also suggested that settler violence should be understood as “a form of government policy, aided and abetted by official state authorities with their active participation.”<sup>15</sup>

## **What are the impacts of settler terrorism?**

Israel’s settlement enterprise consistently infringes on the rights of Palestinians, and those who are affected by it live in uncertainty and misery. Due to Israel’s occupation, Palestinians are often denied freedom of movement through the use of hundreds of roadblocks, checkpoints, restricted zones and Jewish-only roads. On top of this, settler terrorism may result in the demolition of their wells, the exploitation of their resources, the destruction

of their agricultural lands and resources, or other forms of intimidation and harassment.<sup>16</sup> Palestinians describe how they sometimes abandon or reduce traditional activities like sheep and goat farming or various seasonal crops, due to the often life-threatening settler violence they face.<sup>17</sup> Settler terrorism has leaves traumatic psychological effects on the Palestinian population. The “No peace of mind” report conducted in 2021 across 10 communities of the West Bank in Area C revealed that Palestinians suffer from a variety of mental health conditions such as trauma, depression and anxiety arising from rights violations, primarily settler violence, excessive use of force from the Israeli Security Forces, confiscations and demolitions.<sup>18</sup> Feelings of helplessness were widespread with 60% of respondents indicating there was nothing they could do to protect their families when experiencing attacks by settlers and demolitions.<sup>19</sup> 23% of respondents stated they had no hope for the future or that they did not consider thinking about their future.<sup>20</sup>

## How has Canada responded?

Although Global Affairs Canada recognizes the illegality of Israeli settlements, both the Trudeau and Harper governments have been largely silent on the issue, typically emphasizing Israeli security concerns, without mentioning its illegal colonies or international law.<sup>21</sup> When it comes to

addressing settler violence the government has usually resorted to performative and shallow calls for “peace” and “de-escalation” without making any distinction between those who the UN identifies as occupiers and the Palestinian civilian population. Indeed, in the scandalous Huwara incident of settler terrorism of 2023, Canada declined to sign a joint statement from 19 “like-minded” countries which clearly stated that “settler violence is a result of Israel’s continued settlement activities”.<sup>22</sup>

## Is settler violence increasing?

From 2010 to 2019, OCHA recorded nearly 3000 settler attacks which collectively left 22 Palestinians dead and 1258 injured.<sup>23</sup> The highest number of settler attacks were recorded in the governorates of Ramallah, Hebron, and Nablus. Israeli settler-related violence has increased from an average of one incident per day in 2021, to an average of two incidents per day in 2022, to an average of three incidents per day since the beginning of 2023.<sup>24</sup> This represents the highest daily average of settler-related incidents involving Palestinians since 2006.<sup>25</sup> Given the extreme right-wing leaning of Israel’s government elected at the end of 2022, settler violence is only expected to increase, bolstered by explicit encouragement from political leaders.

<sup>1</sup> “Pragmatic Settlements in the West Bank and Implications for Israel and Palestine,” Harvard International Review, Accessed on Wednesday, 15, 2023,

<https://hir.harvard.edu/pragmatic-settlements-in-the-west-bank-and-implications-for-israel-and-palestine/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> “Settlement & Annexation Report: March 11, 2022.” Foundation for Middle East Peace, March 2022.

<sup>4</sup> “Israeli Settlements and International Law”, Amnesty International 2019

<sup>5</sup> Zabaneh, Rania. “In West Bank, settler violence forcing out Palestinian Bedouins.” Aljazeera. February 27, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Munayyer, Yousef. “The Dynamics of Israeli Settler Terrorism and US options.” Arab Center Washington DC. September 15, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> UN experts alarmed by rise in settler violence in occupied Palestinian territory,” United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Accessed on Wednesday, 15, 2023,

<sup>8</sup> Munayyer, Yousef. “The Dynamics of Israeli Settler Terrorism and US options.” Arab Center Washington DC. September 15, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> “A Threshold Crossed Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution.” Human Rights Watch, April 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Munayyer, Yousef. “The Dynamics of Israeli Settler Terrorism and US options.” Arab Center Washington DC. September 15, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> “Data Sheet, December 2022: Law Enforcement on Israeli Civilians in the West Bank (Settler violence) 2005-2022,” Yesh Din, December 2022.

<sup>12</sup> “Settler Violence = State Violence.” B’tselem, November 2021, [https://www.btselem.org/settler\\_violence](https://www.btselem.org/settler_violence)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> “Dignity denied: Life in the settlement area of Hebron” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, February 2020.

<sup>17</sup> “Settler Violence = State Violence.” B’tselem, November 2021.

<sup>18</sup> “No peace of Mind”, Médecins du Monde France and the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), August 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> For more information see CJPME’s Israel’s Illegal Settlements, August 2019,

[https://www.cjpme.org/eg2019\\_israel\\_illegal\\_settlement\\_expansion](https://www.cjpme.org/eg2019_israel_illegal_settlement_expansion)

<sup>22</sup> United Kingdom Foreign Office, “Diplomatic missions visit the Palestinian community of Huwara,” March 4, 2023,

<https://www.ukpol.co.uk/press-release-diplomatic-missions-visit-the-palestinian-community-ofhuwara-march-2023/> 16 Canada in Ramallah

<sup>23</sup> “Casualties I Thousands killed in conflict-related incidents” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, February 2020.

<sup>24</sup> “Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians by the numbers,”

AlJazeera, Accessed on Wednesday, 15, 2023,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/3/israeli-settler-attacks-against-palestinians-by-the-numbers#:~:text=Increasing%20number%20of%20settler%20attacks,least%201%2C258%20others%20were%20injured>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid