

## **Weekly Focus: Settler violence**

29 May – 4 June

Settler violence is a frequent and ongoing affliction of the Palestinian population of the West Bank. From the seven reported incidents of settler violence this week, Al-Haq documented three cases, which clearly constitute violations of international law.

### **The cases**

#### **Settlers set fire to fields near Madama Village**

On the afternoon of Monday, 30 May 2011, settlers from the Yitzhar settlement near Nablus set fire to a barley field belonging to the Palestinian residents of Madama village. According to a Palestinian witness, the Israeli settlers set fire to six dunums (6000m<sup>2</sup>) of land. It took the residents of the village two hours to extinguish the blaze, which caused extensive damage to the crops. (See Al-Haq Affidavit No. 6376/2011)

#### **Settlers set fire to fields and attack farmers from Far'ata Village**

Three days later, on Thursday, 2 June 2011 at around 7:00 pm, Israeli settlers from the Hafat Gel'ad settlement also close to Nablus, armed with lead pipes and sticks, confronted Palestinian farmers from Far'ata village and threatened to burn their fields of wheat. The settlers set fire to a field several hundred metres away, at which point the farmers called the Israeli District Commanding Officer. The Palestinians and settlers threw stones at each other until the Israeli forces arrived, dispersing both groups.

The soldiers fired live ammunition into the air and targeted Palestinian farmers with tear gas and sound grenades. They then arrested two brothers, one of whom had been severely beaten by two settlers. After being escorted by Israeli soldiers to a nearby ambulance for partial treatment, the men were then taken to a succession of Israeli military and police posts and verbally abused. They were later released to the Rafidiya Hospital in Nablus and returned home around 5:00 am the following day. (See Al-Haq Affidavit No. 6375/2011)

#### **Settler children attack family with stones**

Also on Thursday 2 June 2011, an 11-year-old student and resident of Hebron was walking in the Old City with her aunt, sister and three cousins. Shortly after 3:00 pm as they were passing beneath some settler dwellings, a group of young settlers, all around 15 years old, began throwing stones from beside an Israeli military lookout station. One stone hit the witness' right leg and another hit her 7-year old cousin, Amjed, in the head causing heavy bleeding. The Israeli settlers then ran out of sight, either behind or inside the lookout station. Amjed was taken to the

Hebron Government Hospital and released with stitches shortly after midnight. (See Al-Haq Affidavit No. 6373/2011)

### **The law**

- The situation of permanent threat and attack to Palestinians by both settlers and soldiers amounts to a failure by Israel to uphold its obligations as an Occupying Power to provide the occupied population with the protection they are afforded under international humanitarian law (IHL).
- Israel has consciously granted impunity for settler violence at the expense of the health, safety, and livelihood of the Palestinian civilian population, especially those living near Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. This violates Israel's obligation as an Occupying Power to prevent, investigate and punish these violations.
- As the Occupying Power, Israel is prohibited from transferring its civilian population to the occupied territory. Establishing the settlements has facilitated such a transfer amounting to a war crime under IHL.
- By their actions Israel is limiting and denying the human rights of the Palestinian population of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem as constituted under International Human Rights Law.

### **Action**

- Israel should ensure the effective protection of the occupied population by preventing, investigating and punishing instances of settler violence. Victims must have access to effective legal remedies including reparation.
- Israel should stop building settlements and dismantle the existing ones, as they constitute violations of the most fundamental principles of IHL and international human rights law.
- Third States parties must uphold their obligation to ensure respect of the Geneva Conventions (as per Common Article 1 Geneva Conventions); pressure Israel to halt its violations of international law; and provide no form of assistance to such violations.

### **More information**

For a comprehensive analysis of Israel's systematic violations of IHL through the construction and maintenance of settlements in the OPT read Al-Haq's report, "[Unmasking the freeze](#)".

For information relating to other documented cases of settler violence see Al-Haq's [field reports](#).