

Urgent Letter from Palestinian Human Rights Organisations

RE: Immediate Intervention Needed in Response to Dangerous Escalation of Settler Violence against Palestinians

7 November 2023

Your Excellency,

It is with great urgency that we, the undersigned Palestinian human rights organisations, address this letter to you in relation to the dangerous escalation of settler violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including Jerusalem, particularly those living in [Area C](#), in parallel to Israel's ongoing military aggression on Gaza and the [deteriorating](#) human rights situation of Palestinians in every part of historic Palestine. As Palestinian human rights organisations, we **urge you to act decisively and meaningfully to hastily and crucially prevent the continuation and escalation of the unabated settler violence, as Israeli settlers, mostly under the protection of Israeli occupying forces, injure and kill Palestinians; damage their sources of livelihood; and forcibly displace them through home demolitions or threats to their lives.**

Since 7 October 2023, the daily average of OCHA-documented Israeli settler attacks resulting in casualties or injuries and/or damage to property has increased by a staggering 133% compared to the first eight months of 2023. Before October, this year had already witnessed an increase of settler violence, with three settler attacks per day, in [contrast](#) to the daily average of two attacks in 2022 and one attack in 2021. Now, OCHA is [reporting](#) that there are seven attacks per day. This surge of attacks is driven by escalating Israeli mobilisation against Palestinians, decades of settler violence [impunity](#), and ongoing discriminatory statements and actions by Israeli officials, including [loosening](#) Israel's gun control.

Between 7 October and 6 November 2023, Israeli settlers killed at least nine Palestinians, including at least one child, and [injured](#) 62 Palestinians, as the Israeli occupying forces killed at least 147 Palestinians, including at least 44 children, in the occupied West Bank, and [injured](#) around 2300.¹ These settlers are well-armed, organised, and often accompanied by Israeli occupying soldiers or individuals in military attire. The Israeli Knesset's National Security Committee reports that Israeli settlers in the West Bank [possess](#) around 150,000 firearms, a number likely to increase to 165,000 this year. Upon the outbreak of the ongoing aggression on Gaza, Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who is illegally residing in a colonial settlement, announced the Ministry's [purchase and distribution](#) of 10,000 assault rifles along with helmets and body armour to further arm Jewish-Israelis – as a continuation of his longstanding policy, which he [described](#) as “important and has proven its usefulness”. On October 15 2023, the Knesset [eased](#) gun control regulations to arm more Jewish-Israelis. This would reportedly [make](#) an additional 400,000 Jewish-Israeli eligible to have a licence for guns. Our documentation and monitoring indicate that Israeli occupying forces and settlers routinely fire live ammunition without restraint, harming and killing Palestinians, including women and children, with OCHA

¹ Al-Haq is currently documenting the killing of Randa Abdallah Abel Aziz Ajaj, a 40-year-old mother of six, and Hussein Mu'taz Hussein Mousa, a 16-year-old Palestinian child, and is yet to confirm if they were killed by Israeli settlers or by the Israeli occupying forces.

[reporting](#) that around 27 percent of injuries sustained by Palestinians since 7 October 2023 have been caused by live ammunition.

Israeli settlers and occupying forces routinely [target](#) agricultural lands and critical infrastructure, particularly water wells and roads, which are [essential](#) for daily life and livelihoods. This exponential spike in settler violence has directly disrupted the ongoing olive harvest season, which is a critical source of livelihood for many Palestinian families. Coordinating through WhatsApp and [Telegram](#) groups, Israeli settlers circulate messages containing photos and locations of harvesters near roads frequented by settlers, promoting violent incitement and actively encouraging such actions. The dramatic surge in settler attacks on and harassment of Palestinian farmers has killed a Palestinian, 39-year-old Bilal Saleh, a father of four children, as he was picking olives, and forced Palestinians to flee their homes and source of livelihoods to avoid imminent attacks. Further, the Israeli Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich [called](#) for the establishment of “sterile zones” to “prevent Arabs from entering” and a ban of Palestinians from harvesting their lands in areas near to where Israeli colonial settlements were established.

In the past four weeks, OCHA [reports](#) that at least 905 Palestinians, including 356 children, have been forcibly displaced because of Israeli settler violence and access and movement restrictions. These Palestinians comprise of at least 111 households from over 15 herding or Bedouin communities. Since 2022, Israeli settler attacks have [forcibly displaced](#) nearly 2,000 Palestinians. Nearly half of these have occurred in the past month. Furthermore, between 7 October and 3 November 2023, the Israeli occupying authorities demolished 34 Palestinian homes on the grounds of not acquiring building permits, which are rarely [issued](#), on punitive grounds, or during military raids, forcibly displacing at least 165 Palestinians, according to Al-Haq’s initial documentation.

Even before the start of the ongoing military aggression on Gaza, the Israeli government explicitly [declared](#) their intent to annex the occupied West Bank; surreptitiously *de facto* [annexed](#) the entirety of the West Bank, incorporating the Civil Administration from the direction of the military commander under COGAT to the direct competence of an Israeli government ministry; and aggressively [accelerated](#) colonial settlement expansion in the West Bank. From January through July 2023, Israel [advanced](#) 12,855 settler housing units across the West Bank, a stark increase compared to the previous yearly average of between 1,000 and 8,500 units. The government also [granted](#) sweeping powers to Smotrich to expedite the construction of these settlements, effectively granting him control of the entire settlement-building process. In March 2023, the Knesset [repealed](#) Israel’s 2005 Disengagement Law, thus lifting the ban on Israelis entering former settlements in the northern West Bank. Settler caravans have arrived at the formerly dismantled Homesh settlement, signalling the encouragement and support for increased settler expansion in Area C. In May 2023, the Israeli government [passed](#) a two-year budget for 2023-2024 that includes an allocation of around USD 941 million for settler roads in the West Bank, around USD 152 million for the Ministry of Settlements and National Missions, and around USD 106 million to the Settlements Division. **Israel’s explicit plan to expand its colonial settlement enterprise in the West Bank is dependent on the forcible displacement and dispossession of Palestinians, and maintained by Third States’ deliberate failure to take meaningful and effective steps, in accordance with their obligations under international law, to ensure that Israel brings an end to its illegal occupation, settlement enterprise, and settler-colonial apartheid regime.**

We remind you that Israel's colonial settlements are internationally recognised as unlawful, and considered to be a serious violation of international law, as the United Nations (UN) Security Council has asserted, at least six times since 1979, Israel's establishment of colonial settlements in occupied territory has "no legal validity" and, more explicitly, is a "flagrant violation under international law". Furthermore, Israeli colonial settlements [represent](#) a key method by which Israel has established and maintained an institutionalised regime of racial domination and oppression, amounting to the crime of apartheid, over the Palestinian people as a whole. Despite being limited to the West Bank, including the eastern part of Jerusalem, these structures are but one part of a larger strategy to ensure that the Palestinian people remain fragmented over both sides of the Green Line, and the world. This is in stark violation of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right of Palestinian refugees to return.

Considering Israel's consistent disregard for Palestinians' right to life throughout historic Palestine, coupled with institutionalised impunity for settlers, we reiterate our calls to immediately mobilise to enforce a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, and to push Israel to reinstate the supplying of fuel, water, food, electricity and medical and humanitarian aid necessary for the survival of the protected population therein, and call on your State to intervene immediately, specifically to:

- 1) Immediately take effective measures to ensure the protection of Palestinians against Israeli settlers, including by increasing international protective presence to Palestinian communities who have been displaced or are currently under the [imminent](#) threat of being forcibly displaced, and to those tending to their land, particularly in Area C;
- 2) Demand that Israel lift movement restrictions to allow Palestinians to carry out the olive harvest, as the olive harvest is a critical source of income and food staple for Palestinian communities;
- 3) Recognise Israel's colonial settlement enterprise as one policy designed to maintain an institutionalised regime of racial domination and oppression over the Palestinian people as a whole, and address the root causes of Palestinian dispossession and domination, and the undermining of the individual and collective rights of the Palestinian people, [inherent](#) in Zionist settler colonialism;
- 4) Match your statements of condemnation of Israel's colonial settlement enterprise with arms embargoes, economic sanctions and countermeasures against Israel; and targeted individual sanctions against Israeli settlers, including those with dual-citizenships, and Israeli settler organisations;
- 5) Take steps to implement domestic legislation to prohibit the import of settlement goods and services into their jurisdictions, as products fuelling and incentivising the ongoing violence against the protected Palestinian population;
- 6) Demand Israel end its institutionalised impunity for settler violence which has led to killing and injuries of Palestinians, damage to Palestinian properties and infrastructure, and forcible transfer of Palestinians, including by conducting full and impartial

investigations, and holding Israeli perpetrators accountable (both Israeli settlers and Israeli occupation forces); and

- 7) Recognise Israel's judicial system as part and parcel of Israel's apartheid regime, and provide full cooperation to the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC and the UN ongoing Commission of Inquiry, to ensure justice and accountability.

Yours sincerely,

1. Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)
2. Bisan Center for Research and Development
3. Palestine Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR)
4. Ma'an Development Center
5. The Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem (ARIJ)
6. The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy - MIFTAH
7. Sabeel, Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center
8. Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG)
9. Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC)
10. Al-Ard for Agricultural Development
11. The Community Action Center (CAC) at Al-Quds University
12. MUSAWA- The Palestinian Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession

The Jerusalem Human Rights Consortium, comprising of:

13. The Jerusalem Legal and Human Rights Centre (JLAC)
14. The Land Research Centre (LRC)
15. The Society of Saint Yves
16. The Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC)

Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC), comprising of:

17. Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association
18. Aldameer Association for Human Rights

19. Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man
20. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
21. Defense for Children International – Palestine
22. Hurryyat - Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights
23. Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center
24. Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights - Observer Member
25. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
26. The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) - Observer Member