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## The ongoing clearances in the Palestinian highlands



On September 21st the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) published a [report](#) detailing the impact of settler violence and harassment by Israeli military forces on a sample of Palestinian herding communities across the West Bank. Home to around 10,000 people, 24% of whom are women and 51% children, these 63 communities are highly vulnerable due to their proximity to settlements and exposure to settler violence.

Some 93% of the communities reported a higher frequency of settler violence and 90% reported that the severity of the settler violence had increased since the beginning of 2022.

'Settler violence has been increasing across the West Bank over the past years. Three settler related incidents per day occurred on average in the first eight months of 2023 compared to an average of two per day in 2022 and one per day the year before.'

A total of 1,105 people from 28 communities – about 12% of their population - have been displaced from their places of residence since 2022, citing settler violence and the prevention of access to grazing land by settlers as the primary reason.

In the Governorate of Ramallah where four communities - Ras a-Tin, 'Ein Samia, al-Baq'ah and al-Qabun - have been completely displaced and are now empty, the U.N. recorded 150 Palestinians injured and four killed by either Israeli settlers or Israeli forces in settler-related incidents between January and early August this year. That's nearly double the number of injuries recorded in all of 2022.

On September 18th, B'Tselem published an article entitled [The pogroms are working – the transfer is already happening](#), which describes measures employed by Israel to make life in many Palestinian communities in the West Bank intolerable, forcing residents to uproot themselves, seemingly of their own accord. The report details the events that led up to the clearance of Ras a-Tin, 'Ein Samia, al-Baq'ah and al-Qabun, as well as two communities in the South Hebron Hills, Khirbet Simri and Widady a-Tahta.

'In recent years, settlers have built dozens of outposts and small farms near these communities with the aid of the state, and since then, violence against Palestinians living in the area has increased, reaching new heights under the current government. These violent attacks, which have become a terrifying daily routine,

include settlers driving Palestinian shepherds and farmers out of pasturelands and farm fields, physically assaulting residents of the communities, entering their homes in the middle of the night, setting fire to Palestinian property, scaring livestock, destroying crops, theft and road closures. Palestinian residents have also reported water tank valves being opened and settler flocks being led to drink in Palestinian water reservoirs.

In these circumstances, residents of these communities could no longer continue going out to their pasturelands and farm fields. With the Palestinians gone, settlers, in some places, began cultivating their fields under the protection of soldiers. In other places, settlers began grazing their owned flocks in pasturelands that had until recently been used by Palestinian shepherds. Without access to pasturelands, Palestinians have had to switch to purchasing fodder and water for their flocks at a high cost, which has caused significant financial losses, effectively destroying their livelihoods.'

Harassment and displacement of these once thriving pastoral communities has been promoted by the organisation Regavim, brainchild of current member of the Israeli government Bezalel Smotrich, who as well as being a finance minister holds a post in the ministry of defence, overseeing the work of COGAT, the military authority in control of 'Area C', 60% of the West Bank. The Campaign to Defund Racism has just published a report, [Regavim: How charities are funding indigenous erasure](#).

'... an examination of the organization's public records confirms its motives and profound impact on the perpetuation of settler colonialism in Palestine. The violence inherent to the organization's vision and goals are illustrated through the tangible impacts on the communities that it targets — through the loss of community privacy and security, home demolitions, resource theft, as well as physical displacement and ethnic cleansing. In this case, these patterns are deliberately designed to displace indigenous communities in favour of a settler movement.'