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Settler Violence is State Violence



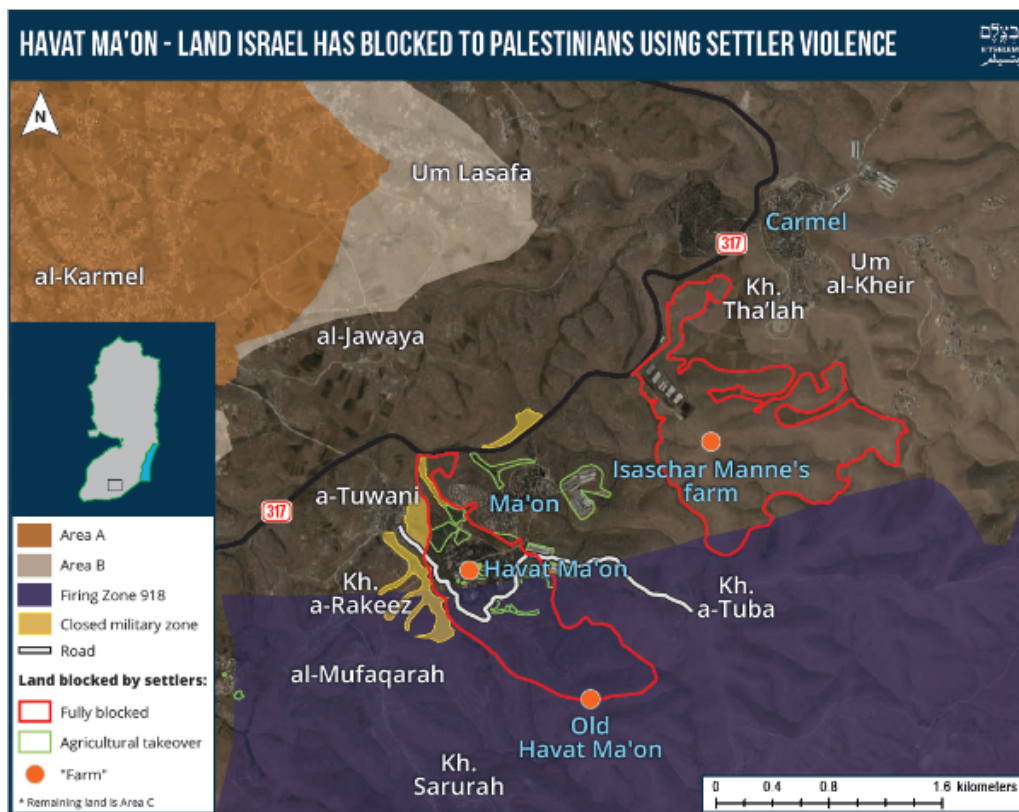
Last November, B'Tselem published a carefully-researched, thorough and damning [report](#) about the violence regularly and increasingly committed by Israeli settlers: *State Business - Israel's misappropriation of land in the West Bank through settler violence*. Based on five case studies, covering the South Hebron Hills area, the Jordan Valley, the area west of Ramallah and the area south of Nablus, the report identifies three main, underpinning elements of settler violence: 'the participation of Israeli security forces in violent incidents, the disregard of Israeli authorities for their duty to protect Palestinians, and the near complete immunity the state gives settlers who harm Palestinians.'

Drawing on first-hand accounts by members of some of the Palestinian communities subjected to these attacks, the report makes it clear that the violence perpetrated by 'settlers' is persistent and systematic, with the clear aim of driving Palestinians off their land to make way for enlarged and consolidated blocs of Israeli 'settlement'.

Settler violence against Palestinians serves as a major informal tool at the hands of the state to take over more and more West Bank land. The state fully supports and assists these acts of violence, and its agents sometimes participate in them directly. As such, settler violence is a form of government policy, aided and abetted by official state authorities with their active participation.

In 2021 Palestinian communities in the West Bank were subjected to an unprecedented and rising level of attacks by Israeli 'settlers'. On November 10th, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) reported that in the first ten months of the year there had been 410 attacks by settlers against Palestinians (302 against property and 108 against individuals). Over that period, four Palestinians had been killed by settlers. By the 6th December the number of attacks reported by UN OCHA had risen to 450, including 118 incidents that led to Palestinian casualties. This compares to 2020, when a total of 358 attacks were recorded, and 2019, when there were 335 such attacks.

On the 5th August the British Consulate-General in Jerusalem issued a statement saying that, according to UN OCHA '... the total number of settler attacks across the West Bank that have resulted in injury and/or property damage in 2021 has increased by 46 per cent compared to the same period in 2020. Meanwhile, Yesh Din report that 96 per cent of investigations by Israeli authorities into alleged acts of settler violence do not lead to the filing of an indictment.' While visiting the village of Beita, the British Consul General, Diane Corner, added, 'We condemn any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians. We urge the Israeli authorities to address settler violence and to thoroughly investigate every incident to bring those responsible to justice and end the culture of impunity.'



The outpost of Havat Ma'on is located at the northern edge of Firing Zone 918, an area from which Israel has been trying for years to expel 12 Palestinian shepherding communities. The Israeli state is striving to create a settlement bloc stretching from Carmel, through Isaschar Manne's farm, Ma'on and Havat Ma'on, all the way to Avigayil and Susiya. This 'buffer zone' is intended to separate these Palestinian villages from the Bedouin population of the Arad Valley and the Beersheba Valley inside the Green Line.



Israeli settlers from the settlement outpost Havat Maon in the South Hebron Hills. They are wearing sweatshirts that read, 'Havat Maon. We live in the trenches, but we're used to it.'

There are currently some 400,000 Israeli 'settlers' living illegally in the Occupied West Bank. In addition to the 138 officially established 'settlements' recognised by the Israeli state, there are some 150 'unofficial' outposts.

... some 150 outposts have been built, at least 54 of them fully or partially on land that Israel acknowledges is privately owned by Palestinians. There have been three waves of outpost construction so far: The first wave saw the construction of about 50 outposts, mostly in 1997 and 1998, immediately after the Oslo Accords were signed. The second wave took place during the peak of the second intifada – 2001 to 2003 – with about 50 more outposts established. In the last decade, about 50 more outposts have been built in the West Bank. Some 40 of them are referred to as “farms,” and they rely on sheep, goat and cattle herding in large areas. The farms were mostly set up on land registered as “state land” prior to 1967, or declared as such by Israel since the early 1980s. Compared to construction in settlements, starting a farm requires far fewer resources, allowing for easy takeover of vast areas spanning thousands of dunams. These areas usually contain – or are adjacent to – pastureland, water sources and land cultivated by Palestinians.

Though contrary to its official policy, the Israeli state provides significant material support to these 'outposts'. 'Israel has ordered the military to defend the outposts or paid for their security, as well as paved roads and laid down water and electricity infrastructure for most of them.' Settler violence as a means of expropriating land has the advantage for the Israeli state of 'deniability'. When challenged, the authorities can wring their hands and disown the perpetrators or, even, engage in the theatre of 'evacuating' them, while stealthily allowing them to return under the guise of establishing 'religious schools' or 'yeshivas'.



Israeli settlers from Yitzhar throw stones at Palestinians from the village of Asira al-Qibiliya south of the city of Nablus on May 19th 2021.

According to UN OCHA, *These settler attacks are primarily directed against rural Palestinian families living on small farms or in villages and towns in the occupied West Bank located in close proximity to Israeli settlements. Many of these Palestinians reside in the so-called 'Area C' of the West Bank, which is under complete Israeli security and civil control, and where Israel's de facto annexation stratagem is most evident.*

The experts noted that settler violence has taken many forms, including physical violence, shooting with live ammunition, torching of fields and livestock, theft and vandalization of property, trees and crops, stone-throwing and tenacious intimidation of herders and their families. In the autumn, it is often directed towards Palestinians engaged in the olive harvest. Harvested olives are stolen or ruined. Olive trees are destroyed. Harvesters are attacked with rocks and pipes, or threatened with weapons.

On other occasions, settlers have seized private or public Palestinian land and brought sheep and cattle to graze on the land, as an initial step to drive Palestinians away from their land. If Palestinians attempt to keep their land, they are frequently met with violence.



Attack on al-Muafaqara: 29.09.2021

At 1.00 pm on the 29th September 2021 a group of masked settlers assaulted a Palestinian shepherd on the outskirts of al-Muafaqara, in Masafer Yatta just south of Hebron. They slit the throats of three of his sheep, then forced the shepherd and the two children with him to flee for their lives.

Soon afterwards, several dozen more masked settlers arrived in the village itself, armed with handguns, stones, clubs, and sticks. They set about assaulting mothers and children outside their homes. Many were injured by rocks, including three-year-old Mohammad Bakr al-Hamamdah who suffered serious head injuries and had to be hospitalised.

Now the residents of al-Muafaqara are afraid to go outside their houses. At night they take shifts standing guard, determined to protect their village but wary and fearful. The windows of the houses are still broken and the cars that were vandalised by the settlers remain in disrepair.



Mahmoud Hamamdah carrying teargas thrown at his village of al-Mufaqara by Israeli settlers.



One thing the B'Tselem report makes clear is that, despite the resilience and steadfastness (sumud) of the Palestinian communities subjected to them, these years of violent assaults have taken a deep psychological toll, destroying as they have what was once a very viable way of life with its own distinctive traditions and culture.

Our good times are a thing of the past. All we have left is the memory of living comfortably, when we had a large flock of camels and goats. We used to save money and trade it for gold. Now, our women have to sell their gold jewelry to ensure a minimal standard of living for the children, because everything is so expensive.

We're used to living out in the open and moving about freely. We were born here and used to lead a good life with a good income. We made a living from our dairy products and relied on pastureland without buying a lot of fodder. We used dry wood for heating, cooking and boiling milk, and a rainwater cistern to water the flock. Now that's become too dangerous, as well, because settlers threaten the shepherds when they go to the cistern and steal their buckets. I don't see how we can grow the vegetables we used to rely on in summer.



A key phase in the wave of settler violence occurs each year around the time of the olive harvest, which runs between October and November. The olive harvest is a lifeline for some 80,000 to 100,000 Palestinian families in the occupied West Bank.



16.10.21: Burin

Burin, south of Nablus, was the site of a large-scale settler attack on October 16th. Around 30 hooded settlers from the illegal hilltop outpost of Givat Ronen pelted the nearby Palestinian home of the Eid family with stones and lit multiple brush fires. Three female members of the Eid family, 21-year-old nursing student Asil Eid, her mother, Isra Eid, 46, and her sister Aya Eid, 16, were huddled inside the house. 'I felt very afraid, but when I saw more and more joining I felt more and more afraid.' Some Burin residents ran to the scene and threw stones at the settlers in a bid to protect the house.

Jamal Qadus, a 56-year-old resident of Burin, said 15 of his olive trees were torched as the fires spread. He said that the soldiers 'protected the settlers and fired tear gas at us.' It wasn't his first brush with trouble that month. He recounted a separate incident from October 4th during which Yitzhak Levy, the security coordinator from the nearby Yitzhar settlement, called in soldiers and ordered them to evict him, his wife, and daughter from a grove of 40 of his olive trees.

According to French NGO, Premiere Urgence Internationale, *Palestine has some of the world's oldest olive trees, dating back to 4,000 years, making the olive harvest an integral part of Palestinian cultural heritage. Palestinian olive cultivation represents the steadfastness and resilience of communities that are engaged in a daily struggle to remain on their lands.*

The yearly spike in settler violence during the harvest and the inability of farmers to access their olive trees therefore endangers not only the livelihoods and economic sustainability of Palestinians, but also Palestinians' cultural and physical connection to the land.

The Israeli authorities are perfectly aware of the situation. Yet instead of ensuring that Palestinians can access their lands and cultivate them safely, they have designed a 'coordination mechanism' that requires farmers to make prior arrangements with the military in order to gain strictly limited access to their lands.

This year, during the olive harvest there were at least 39 incidents of settler violence targeting farmers and their livelihood assets. This is more than one incident every two days. Of these attacks, 92% resulted in casualties, property damage, or the stealing of crops and harvesting tools.

Of note, 53.8% per cent of this year's incidents (21) took place in prior coordination areas next to settlements, where Palestinians access is heavily restricted. In most of these cases, farmers found that their trees had been damaged or burnt, or that the fruit had already been harvested. Already in September 2021, prior to – and impacting- the Olive Harvest, 338 olive trees were set on fire by settlers, 142 olive trees were cut down and vandalized, 7 olive trees were uprooted, and the harvest of 26 trees was stolen.

The UN OCHA, in its report covering the period 5-18th October, documented numerous settler attacks, including damaging over 1,600 trees (most of them olive trees) or stealing Palestinians' harvest. These attacks took place in villages neighbouring the cities of Nablus, Hebron, Salfit, Ramallah and Jerusalem.



In the space of less than 10 days, Musleh Badawi and his family were attacked on three separate occasions by settlers while working on their land and picking olives. During the first attack, on 29th October, the culprits were from the adjacent Esh Kodesh settlement. They came to the farmers' lands and stole their harvesting equipment and four large sacks of olives that were estimated to contain 5000 shekels (\$1,600) worth of olives. 'We informed the Israeli police and the Israeli Coordination and Liaison Office, but they ignored our complaints. We were preparing for the olive harvest season as if it were a big celebration. But today's events cast a dark shadow on the occasion, due to the settler attacks. If that wasn't enough, we were also prevented from reaching our fields by the Israeli army.

'On 5 November, we went to our other tract of land near the Elieh settlement, which has 50 olive trees,' he said. 'We were surprised to see that the settlers had beat us to the land, and had already picked the trees. The Israeli army then arrived and kicked us out.'

Two days later, the family suffered a third attack while they were on their land, a tract of 10 dunams (one hectare) near the Hayovel outpost.



Homesh is an Israeli settlement outpost in the northern West Bank that was evacuated in 2005 under the terms of the *Disengagement Plan Implementation Law*, which provided almost \$900 million to pay for the relocation of some 9,000 Israeli residents of the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank, and to compensate them for the loss of their homes and livelihoods.

Homesh is located north of the Palestinian village of Burqa on Route 60, the central road going through the occupied West Bank, in the section that connects Nablus to Jenin. According to Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, Homesh has maintained a near constant presence of settlers in the area since its evacuation, 'with security forces allowing them to stay there and attack Palestinians.' Since 2007 it has been the home to an illegally operated 'yeshiva'.

Since its evacuation Homesh has been the centre of several settler attacks against Palestinians from neighbouring villages. Between 2017 and 2021, the Israeli anti-occupation NGO Yesh Din, documented 27 settler attacks in the Homesh area, including both physical bodily violence and property damage.

On August 17th 2021, Tareq Zbeideh, from the northern West Bank town of Silat a-Dahr, was kidnapped and brutally attacked by Israeli settlers as he was picnicking with friends near Homesh.

According to Zbeideh, settlers hit him with their car and tied him to the vehicle, before dragging him to an isolated area and beating him. The attack lasted half an hour, during which, Zbeideh says, the settlers tied

him to a tree, beat him with a belt, sprayed him with pepper spray, electrocuted him, and then burned him with the car's cigarette lighter.



Tareq Zbeideh recovering from his injuries. Bruises and burns are clearly visible on his forearm.

In November 2021, as Palestinian farmers attempted to reach their land, settlers from the outpost attacked them by opening fire, throwing stones, and spraying pepper spray, wounding a number of Palestinians.



On Thursday 16th December Palestinian gunmen ambushed and killed Yehuda Dimentman, 25, as he and two others left Homesh in a car. Dimentman from the West Bank settlement of Shavei Shomron was a student at the 'yeshiva' and a regular participant in its activities. The murder triggered a wave of official and unofficial reprisals, including some 120 documented attacks by settlers.

The next day, Friday December 17th, Israeli settlers launched a dawn raid on Qaryout, south of Nablus, in which several Palestinian civilians sustained wounds and fractures. Some two dozen Israeli settlers raided the village and broke into at least one home and assaulted its residents. 55-year-old Wael Muhammad Maqbal suffered fractured ribs and severe swelling to his face. Maqbal's 46-year-old wife, Samiha, was hospitalized after inhaling pepper spray. She said that one of the assailants was in military uniform.



On Monday December 20th Israeli forces accused two brothers of the murder of Dimentman, Ghaith and Omar Jaradat from the town of Silat al-Harithiya, near Jenin. Israeli soldiers entered the town where they announced their intention to punitively destroy the houses of Ahmed Muhammad Yassin Jaradat – the father of brothers Ghaith and Omar – as well as the family houses of three prisoners, including the brothers' uncle, who were accused of being accomplices. The planned demolition will render four families, comprising over 30 people, homeless.



On the 24th December Israeli settlers attacked the village of Burqa next door to Homesh. Hundreds of Israeli settlers attacked the village under the cover of night after a rally of some 15,000 settlers gathered near the illegal Homesh outpost to commemorate Yehuda Dimentman. Entrances to Burqa had been shut down with earth mounds by the Israeli forces to allow settlers to access Homesh. Earlier in the day there were violent clashes between Israeli soldiers and villagers, with Israeli forces using tear gas and rubber-coated steel bullets against the villagers.

42 Palestinians, including a journalist, were wounded after being hit with rubber-coated steel rounds, while another 83 sustained suffocation from inhalation of tear gas fired by the Israeli army. A girl was treated for shock after a group of Israeli settlers attacked her family's home on the outskirts of the village. Two ambulances were also hit by Israeli soldiers with stun grenades and tear gas canisters.

On the 25th December an Israeli settler rammed his vehicle into an elderly Palestinian woman 63-year-old Ghadir Fuqaha waiting for a taxi and killed her at the entrance to the town of Sinjil northwest of Ramallah

On the 28th December Middle East Monitor reported, 'The occupation army has monitored 15 incidents against Palestinians in recent days, including cases of burning a building, burning a car, throwing stones, raiding a house, hitting with batons, using pepper gas and the like. During one of these violent attacks, a Palestinian truck driver was hit in the head with a stone thrown at him by a group of Israeli settlers in Chumash.'

