

Video shows Israeli troops detaining Palestinian children

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Palestinian boys who were arrested by patrolling Israeli soldiers and taken away. [Photo: Abed al-Hashlamoun/EPA]

Ramallah, March 12 (RHC)-- Israeli forces detained five Palestinian children for several hours after they were confronted by Jewish settlers while gathering wild vegetables near a settlement outpost in the occupied West Bank, an Israeli human rights group said on Thursday.

B'Tselem released video of the arrest in the southern Hebron Hills, in which heavily armed Israeli soldiers can be seen dragging the children away.

Footage shot earlier shows the children gathering akoub, a plant similar to artichoke, when two masked settlers emerge from a grove of trees near the illegal settler outpost of Havat Maon. The outpost is located near Masafer Yatta, a collection of about 19 Palestinian hamlets. The area is a frequent target of assaults by the Israeli military and settlers.

“This is another example of the absolute disregard on the part of Israeli authorities and forces on the ground to the wellbeing and rights of Palestinians, no matter how young or vulnerable,” B’Tselem spokesman Amit Gilutz said. “The youngest boy from yesterday’s incident is eight years old,” he added.

The children, whose ages range from eight to 13, were held for about five hours at a police station in the settlement of Kiryat Arba, according to Gaby Lasky, a human rights lawyer who is representing them. The two eldest, who are 12 and 13, were ordered to return next week for more questioning as, under Israeli military law, they are deemed old enough to face charges

The Israeli military said “a number of suspects” were detained after they “infiltrated into a house’s private property.” It said they were transferred to the Israeli police, who released them to their parents.

According to Defense for Children International, Israel prosecutes between 500 and 700 Palestinian children in military courts each year. Prisoners’ rights group Addameer has said 140 Palestinian children are currently imprisoned by Israel.

Havat Maon is one of dozens of settler outposts established without Israeli government authorisation, in addition to some 130 officially recognised settlements in the occupied West Bank. The settlements, which range from remote hilltop outposts to full-fledged towns, are home to nearly a half-million Israelis.

Lasky said it’s “crazy” to accuse the children of trespassing in an outpost that was built illegally. The Palestinians view all settlements as illegal and a major obstacle to their goal of bringing about an independent state including the West Bank, which Israel captured in the 1967 war. The international community also largely views the settlements as illegal and an impediment to peace.

On Thursday, a group of Israeli settlers fired their guns towards two Palestinian children in Masafer Yatta. The two children, 12 and 13 years old, were not wounded in the attack.

Rateb Jabour, coordinator of the Wall and Colonization Resistance Commission in Hebron, told Palestinian news agency Wafa that the settlers opened fire towards the children while they were grazing sheep in the area of Masafer Yatta.

Many of the settler outposts have been established by religious nationalists who are hostile to the local Palestinian population. B’Tselem has reported a rise in settler violence in recent months and said the Israeli military often turns a blind eye.

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