

United Nations report shows increasing Israeli settler attacks on Palestinians

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Nearly 500,000 Israeli settlers live in more than 200 settlements and dozens of unauthorised outposts across the Palestinian territories [File: Mohamad Torokman/Reuters]

United Nations, April 15 (RHC)--United Nations human rights experts have warned that violence, including assaults and property destruction, by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians in the occupied West

Bank has increased substantially in recent months.

During the first three months of 2021, more than 210 settler violent incidents were recorded, including one Palestinian death, they said. "In 2020, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) documented 771 incidents of settler violence causing injury to 133 Palestinians and damaging 9,646 trees and 184 vehicles mostly in the areas of Hebron, Jerusalem, Nablus and Ramallah," the experts said in a statement on Wednesday.

The group of experts behind the report included Michael Lynk, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, special rapporteur on adequate housing and right to non-discrimination, and independent expert Claudia Mahler.

They called on the Israeli military and police to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the violent acts. According to the experts, the violence has been mainly motivated by ideology and intended to "intimidate and terrorise Palestinians", and prevent them from accessing their land while pushing others to move.

"They primarily target the livelihoods of rural Palestinians, vandalising livestock, agricultural lands, trees and homes," they said. In their statement, the experts noted a violent incident in Hebron on March 13, which saw a Palestinian family of parents and eight children attacked by 10 Israeli settlers, some of whom were armed. "The injured parents were treated at a medical facility in Hebron, and the children left traumatised," it said.

Nearly 500,000 Israeli settlers live in more than 200 settlements and dozens of unauthorised outposts scattered across the Palestinian territories.

Palestinians want to establish a state in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip – territories Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war. The Palestinians, who have limited self-rule in the West Bank, say Israel's settlements deny them a viable state. Most countries view the settlements as illegal under international law.

The rights experts also highlighted that dozens of Palestinian families living in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah face the threat of eviction from their homes. "Similarly worrying are reports that over 70 families living in the Karm Al-Ja'buni area of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem are under threat of forced eviction to make place for new settlements," said the statement.

"Seven households have already received eviction orders and asked to vacate their homes by 2 May 2021. Such forced evictions leading to population transfers are strictly prohibited under international law," it added.

Sheikh Jarrah, located on the slopes of Mount Scopus just north of the Old City, is home to 3,000 Palestinians, all refugees who were ethnically cleansed from their homes in other parts of historical Palestine during the 1948 Nakba.

In October last year, the Israeli magistrate court of Jerusalem ruled to evict 12 of the 24 Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah and to give their homes to Jewish settlers. The court also ruled that each family must pay 70,000 shekels (\$20,000) in fees to cover the settlers' legal expenses.

According to Grassroots Jerusalem, an NGO that is a platform for Palestinian community-based mobilisation, there has been an influx of Jewish settlers since 2001. Invoking the Fourth Geneva Convention, the experts called on Israel to adhere to international law, which requires it to protect the population under occupation.

Calling on the international community to "impose meaningful costs on Israel's protracted occupation", the experts also demanded Israel halt its settlement expansion in the West Bank. "Palestinians must be

protected from settler violence and the perpetrators must be held to account for their actions.”

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