

UN says possible Israeli war crimes in East Jerusalem land right case



??Israeli forces force a door of a Palestinian family to raid the house as Palestinians gather to stage a demonstration at Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. (Mostafa Alkharouf/Anadolu Agency)?

Geneva, May 9 (RHC)-- The United Nations urged Israel on Friday to call off any forced evictions in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem warning its actions could amount to "war crimes." "We call on Israel to immediately call off all forced evictions," UN rights office spokesman Rupert Colville told reporters in Geneva.

"We wish to emphasize that East Jerusalem remains part of the occupied Palestinian territory, in which international humanitarian law applies," Colville said. "The occupying power ... cannot confiscate private property in occupied territory."

Transferring civilian populations into occupied territory is illegal under international law and "may amount to war crimes," he added. Colville's comments came after 15 Palestinians were arrested in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem overnight after protests over an eviction threat against four Palestinian families.

The second straight night of arrests in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood was fuelled by a years-long land dispute between Palestinian refugees and Jewish settlers in the strategic district near Jerusalem's Old City.

Colville demanded Israel halt actions that "further contribute to a coercive environment or leads to a risk of forcible transfer." "We further call on Israel to respect freedom of expression on assembly, including with those who are protesting against the evictions, and to exercise maximum restraint in the use of force," he said.

Meanwhile, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Britain urged Israel to halt settlement-building in the occupied West Bank. "We urge the government of Israel to reverse its decision to advance the construction of 540 settlement units in the Har Homa E area of the occupied West Bank, and to cease its policy of settlement expansion across the Occupied Palestinian Territories," the European nations said in a statement.

"If implemented, the decision to advance settlements in Har Homa, between East Jerusalem and Bethlehem, will cause further damage to the prospects for a viable Palestinian State."

Jerusalem, which contains sites sacred to Judaism, Islam and Christianity, is at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel captured East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip in a 1967 war. The Palestinian Authority views East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state, and most of the international community regards the settlements that Israel has built there and in the rest of the occupied West Bank as illegal.

Israel's annexation of occupied East Jerusalem is also not recognised by the majority of world leaders. Palestinians have long pointed to a series of state-sanctioned policies designed to expand Israeli-Jewish presence in the city at the expense of Palestinian residents, ranging from house demolitions, daily police harassment, and settlement expansion.

In Sheikh Jarrah, Israeli settlers and border police again attacked a Palestinian vigil in the neighbourhood. On Thursday night, the area was sealed off as far-right Israeli lawmaker Itamar Ben-Gvir set up an office outside one of the Palestinian homes taken over by Israeli settlers. "I came here because children and women are being attacked every evening," he said.

After he spoke, Israeli settlers taunted and provoked the Palestinians, who were breaking their fast for Ramadan outside. Scuffles ensued and Israeli police arrested at least 15 Palestinians.

A Reuters reporter saw a car ablaze near a home taken over by settlers in a back street near the eviction site. Police confirmed it belonged to an Israeli. Videos then showed an Israeli settler firing his weapon from behind a wall.

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