

Israeli forces target Palestinian demonstrators in East Jerusalem



Eruption of violence is the latest friction in Sheikh Jarrah where weeks of protests captured international attention ahead of a 11-day Israeli assault on Gaza last month [File: Ahmad Gharbal/AFP]

Jerusalem, June 22 (RHC)-- Israeli police used stun grenades and sprayed skunk water on Palestinians overnight in the flashpoint occupied East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. There were clashes between Jewish settlers and Palestinians earlier Monday evening with Israeli media reporting stones and chairs were thrown between the opposing sides.

The Palestine Red Crescent said 20 Palestinians were wounded in the fighting and reports said several were arrested. Those hurt included 16 who suffered from pepper spray and tear gas-related injuries, and an elderly person who was hit in the head.

The medic service also said several of its ambulances were targeted by Jewish settlers who hurled stones at its vehicles. Late on Monday, Israeli police could be seen raiding a Palestinian home and throwing a stun grenade at residents inside.

Sheikh Jarrah has been the scene of frequent crackdowns by Israeli police on Palestinians protesting the threatened forced expulsion of dozens of Palestinian families from their homes in favour of hardline Israeli settler groups. Israel calls it “a real-estate dispute” while Palestinians and rights groups say the case highlights discriminatory policies aimed at pushing Palestinians out of Jerusalem.

The eruption of violence is the latest friction in Sheikh Jarrah, where weeks of protests and crackdowns captured international attention ahead of the 11-day Israeli assault on Gaza last month.

A ceasefire took effect on May 21, but the long-running campaign by Jewish settlers to expel Palestinians from their homes continues. And so the cycle of tension and violence endures in a stark early test for Israel’s new coalition government, which is just a week old.

At the helm under a rotation agreement is Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, head of the right-wing Yamina party. In two years, he will be replaced by Yair Lapid, leader of centrist Yesh Atid. And leading the opposition is Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, ousted from the premiership after holding the post for 12 years.

An intervention by Israel’s attorney general at the height of the unrest has put the most imminent expulsion order on hold. But rights groups say the forced removal could still proceed in the coming months as international attention wanes, potentially igniting another round of bloodshed.

The settlers have waged a decades-long campaign to push out the families from densely populated Palestinian neighbourhoods in the so-called Holy Basin, just outside the walls of the Old City, in one of the most sensitive parts of occupied East Jerusalem.

Israel captured East Jerusalem – home to holy sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims – in a 1967 war and annexed it in a move not recognised internationally. Israel views the entire city as its capital, while the Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state.

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