

Israeli settlers refuse to vacate illegal West Bank settlement

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An Israeli soldier runs as smoke rises from burning tires during a Palestinian protest against Jewish settlements in the town of Beita in the Israeli-occupied West Bank [File: Mohamad Torokman/Reuters]

Ramallah, June 26 (RHC)-- West Bank tensions have reached boiling point as Israeli settlers continue their expropriation of Palestinian land, in some cases defying Israeli authorities by refusing to evacuate land that Palestinians depend on for their livelihoods.

In May, 34 Palestinians were killed -- the highest monthly figure in 10 years -- with Israel's domestic intelligence agency, the Shin Bet, reporting almost 600 violent incidents, as the Israeli military reinforced its presence in the occupied territory with several more battalions.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in its latest humanitarian report covering the first two weeks of June alone, stated that perpetrators known, or believed to be Israeli settlers, injured 11 Palestinians including four children, damaged vehicles, and destroyed hundreds of olive trees, water systems and other Palestinian-owned property.

As settler violence and Palestinian protests spread, one of the focal points of clashes has been Beita in the northern West Bank near Nablus. Four Palestinians were recently shot dead by Israeli troops as they protested against the theft of more than five acres (two hectares) of their land, which was previously used for the cultivation of olives, for the construction of the illegal Israeli settlement of Evyatar.

The military's civil administration unit ruled about 50 prefabricated settler homes constructed on Mount Sabih were illegally built on private Palestinian land and ordered the settlers to evacuate, arguing that their activities were destabilising security in the area.

However, decades of successive Israeli governments' economic and political support for the settler movement, including prevarication and turning a blind eye to illegal outposts, have emboldened the settlers.

Not only are the settlers in Evyatar refusing to evacuate, but they are planning to appeal the evacuation order with further plans to build another 70 settler homes, a synagogue, daycare centre and a school.

Villages in the occupied West Bank often hold Friday demonstrations against land confiscation, house demolitions, and Israeli settlements deemed illegal under international law. Israeli forces usually respond to the protests with disproportionate violence.

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