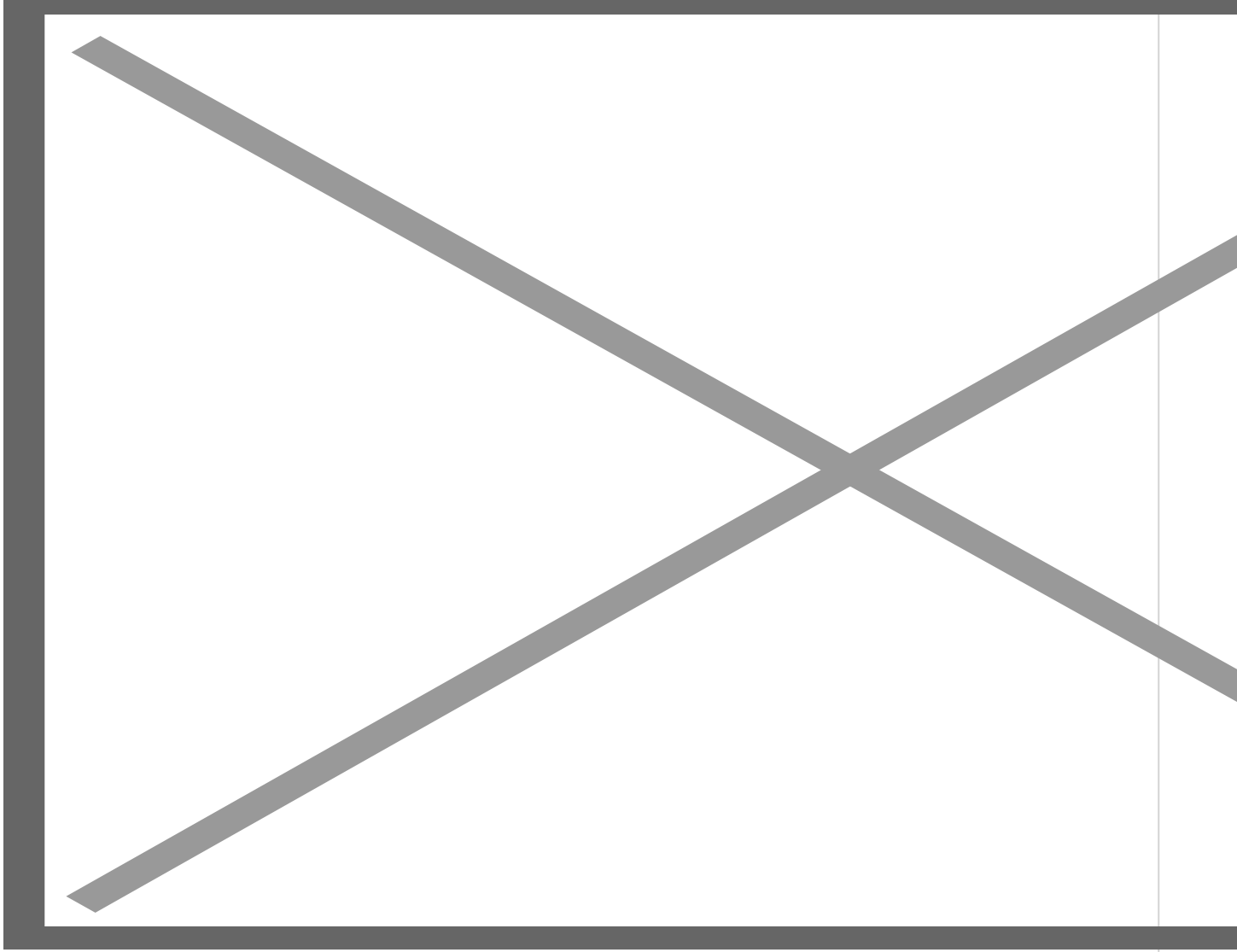


Israeli minister orders five-fold increase in gun permits amid escalation of attacks against Palestinians

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Settlers fire at Palestinians while Israeli soldiers stand by in the town of Huwwara. (File photo by AFP)

Tel Aviv, February 13 (RHC)-- Far-right Israeli minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has issued an order for a major increase in gun permits for settlers as occupation forces continue to kill Palestinians in raids across the West Bank.

Israel's hard-line national security minister ordered the Firearms Licensing Department to increase the number of new permits issued from roughly 2,000 to 10,000 per month, according to a statement from his Otzma Yehudit Party.

It is not strange to see illegal settlers in occupied territories openly carrying pistols or off-duty soldiers carrying their service weapons, especially in settlements across the occupied territories, however, the new order on guns will likely raise fears of more unbridled violence against Palestinians.

In late January, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to expedite gun permits for Israeli citizens and to step up efforts to collect "illegal weapons."

Meanwhile, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, warned that the plans for arming civilians would only lead to more violence and bloodshed.

The order comes in the wake of a shooting operation on January 27 near a synagogue in an illegal Israeli settlement in the occupied al-Quds where seven illegal settlers were killed and 10 others wounded. Two illegal settlers were also injured in another shooting attack in the same area one day later.

One night before the deadly shooting, the Israeli forces raided the city of Jenin and its neighboring refugee camp in the north of the occupied West Bank, killing nine Palestinians in one of the deadliest raids in years.

Israeli forces have ramped up attacks against Palestinian towns in recent months in a bid to stifle a growing Palestinian resistance in occupied cities. Dozens of Palestinians have lost their lives and many others have been arrested. In January 2023 alone, at least 38 Palestinians, including five children, have been killed.

The order comes as Ben-Gvir has a long history of inciting violence against Palestinians. Brandishing a loaded gun in the occupied East al-Quds neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah back in mid-October 2022, he said "We're the landlords here, remember that, I am your landlord," before urging settlers to open fire toward Palestinians who were throwing stones in resistance of occupation.

He has maintained his hard-line views after becoming a minister in Netanyahu's far-right cabinet. Late last month, he threatened Palestinians involved in retaliatory operations against Israeli military forces and settlers with "electric chairs."

"Anyone who murders, harms, and slaughters civilians should be sent to the electric chair," Ben-Gvir said.



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