

*Israeli settlers attack, beat up
foreign volunteers helping
Palestinians in West Bank*

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Ramallah, July 22 (RHC)-- Israeli settlers have attacked a group of foreign volunteers helping Palestinian farmers in the occupied West Bank, some of whom needed hospitalization following the attack. According to local Palestinian sources, Palestinian citizens were also hurt in the Sunday attack, which took place in the town of Qusra, located south of the city of Nablus.

Eight foreign volunteers, mainly American, were working with Palestinian farmers in an olive grove when Israeli settlers came after them, said David Hummel, an American-German in the group. "We were standing there peacefully, not a threat to anyone, when they started coming towards us and pushing us down the path," Hummel was quoted by AFP as saying.

"They started attacking and beating us all with sticks and metal pipes and they were throwing rocks at us as well," he added. "I was attacked on my legs, on my arms and here on my jaw as well, and it was ... very violent," added the volunteer, showing bruising to his face. Hummel said the group of settlers who attacked them included six women.

The volunteers were members of the International Solidarity Movement, a group that says it deploys people to form a "protective presence" for Palestinians at risk of facing violence in the occupied West Bank. The group also says it was set up "to resist the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land."

According to the mayor of Qusra, Hani Odeh, two women were among four activists, who required treatment following the attack and were taken to the Rafidia hospital in Nablus. Odeh added that Israeli troops arrived at the scene of the assault, but instead of stopping the attacking settlers, they fired warning shots in the air to chase away foreign volunteers and Palestinian farmers.

UN rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said Israel must "prevent further attacks, including by bringing those responsible to account." She noted that the volunteer members of the International Solidarity Movement have been in Qusra for about a month.

"The farmers wanted to clear the land after settlers burned it some time ago", said Odeh, adding that the attacking settlers came from the nearby Esh Kodesh settlement.

The attack came after the International Court of Justice ruled on Friday that Israel's presence in the 1967-occupied Palestinian territories is "unlawful" and must end. "Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful," the World Court said, adding that the regime "is under an obligation" to end it "as rapidly as possible."

Israeli forces and settlers have increased their violent attacks on Palestinians in the occupied West Bank since the regime's genocidal war started on the Gaza Strip early last October. According to the Palestinian authorities, at least 579 Palestinians have been killed in these attacks so far.

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