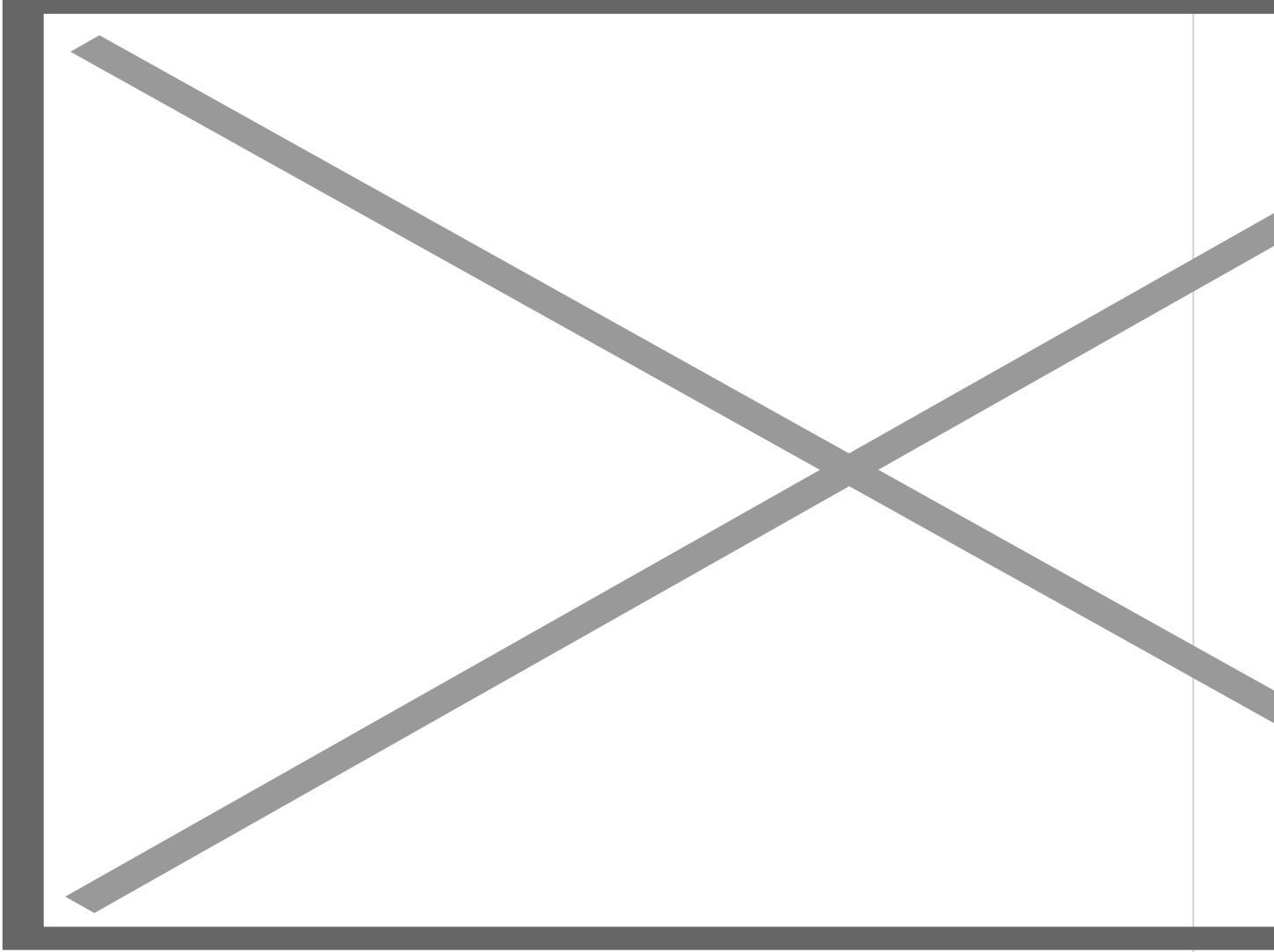


United Nations reports Israeli settlers kidnap Palestinian boys, break their legs and urinate on them

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Israeli soldiers speak with extremist Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank town of Huwara near Nablus. (Photo by AFP)

United Nations, August 16 (RHC)-- Israeli settlers kidnapped and abused two 15-year-old Palestinian boys in the occupied West Bank earlier this week, the UN says. In a "Humanitarian Situation Update" on Thursday, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said the boys were assaulted as they were herding sheep around the suburb of Irtas south of Bethlehem on August 12.

The settlers put knives on the boys' necks and took them to their settlement outpost, where they beat them, broke their legs, and urinated on them, according to the report. They then put the boys in a vehicle and threw them in open land near Irtas.

Other Palestinians found them there and called an ambulance, which took them to a hospital for treatment.

Israeli settlers injured at least four other Palestinians in attacks on August 6, 7 and 9. In one incident, they tried to steal a herd of 400 sheep from Palestinian shepherds near al-Khalil.

The report said there had been 1,250 assaults by Israeli settlers against the Palestinians in the West Bank since Israel launched its campaign of death and destruction in the besieged Gaza Strip on October 7.

An international human rights organization has warned about a "sharp increase" in Israeli settler violence against Palestinians across the occupied territories.

Settlers burn dozens of olive trees

In another development, settlers burned dozens of olive trees in Khalil al-Lawz, near Bethlehem. Dozens of the trees belonging to the al-Abayat and al-Mawaleh families burned in the blaze.

Many Palestinian farming families cultivate olive trees and depend on the olive harvest for their livelihood. "Approximately one million olive trees, many of which were centuries old, have been uprooted by Israel since 1967," Saad Dagher, a Palestinian agronomist earlier said.

"They don't only uproot them on the pretext that they need to make space for settlements or other occupation infrastructure. They also claim that the olive trees represent 'security threats' towards Israelis, as trees are posts behind which Palestinians hide to target soldiers. It's madness."

Every year during the olive harvest season, violent settlers disrupt Palestinian farmers' movement toward their fields and often damage or steal their crops. They also often set the trees on fire or cut them down.

According to UN data, virtually half of the Palestinian agricultural land is planted with an estimated 10 million olive trees in the West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip.

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