

Palestinians outraged by Israeli police complicity with criminal gangs

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Ramallah, March 8 (RHC)-- Spiraling levels of crime and violence in Palestinian communities as well as the Israeli police's inaction to curb violence has outraged Palestinian citizens of Israel, prompting tens of thousands of them to express their resentment by staging a mass demonstration.

The protesters took to the streets in the city of Umm al-Fahm, located 20 kilometers (12 miles) northwest of Jenin, on Friday in what some reporters described as the largest rally against violence and organized crime in the Israeli-occupied territories since the 1980s.

The protesters managed to converge on Umm al-Fahm, even though Israeli military forces had blocked main roads leading to the city. The demonstrators carried Palestinian flags and placards condemning the Israeli police racism and complicity with criminal gangs.

Protesters said Israeli security forces refused to crack down on powerful criminal organizations in the occupied territories. "Police are preventing people from coming to Um al-Fahm because they are scared by both the protestors and criminal organizations," head of the Joint List, a political alliance of four Arab-dominated parties in Israel, Ayman Odeh, told reporters.

Early in February, thousands of Palestinian citizens demonstrated in several towns in support of 22-year old Palestinian Ahmed Hijazi, who was killed during a shootout between Israeli police forces and masked gunmen.

Hijazi was studying for an exam with his friend and neighbor Dr. Mohamed Armoush when they heard the sound of bullets outside. When they peeked through the window, Hijazi was killed and Armoush was wounded. The incident drew condemnation from several Arab members of the Israeli parliament (Knesset) and rights groups.

Haifa-based rights group Adalah condemned Hijazi's killing at the time. "For too long, Israel has ignored the issue of internal violence within Arab communities and has not taken any measures to curb violence," Adalah wrote. "The situation has become disastrous, leading to police invasions of Tamra (city) – the most recent of which turned deadly," it added.

In recent years, there has been a steep rise in crime and violence in Arab communities across the occupied territories. Since the beginning of 2021, 22 Arabs have died in violent incidents.

According to Israeli police, 113 murders took place in Arab communities in 2020, making it the deadliest year yet. In 2019, 91 Palestinian citizens were killed as a result of violent crimes, accounting for 71% of the 125 homicide victims in the occupied territories, where the community makes up about 21% of the population.

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