

Israeli forces violently suppress Palestinian protest in Naqab

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More than 80 Palestinians have been detained since the protests began on Monday [Photo: Al Jazeera]

Beer al Sabe, January 14 (RHC)-- Dozens of Palestinian Bedouins have been wounded in a crackdown by Israeli forces on a protest against continuing Israeli forestation work on land residents say they privately own near the southern city of Beer al-Sabe (Beer Sheva).

Some 500 protesters took part in Thursday's demonstration, which began at 3pm (13:00 GMT). They were met with hundreds of Israeli forces who fired rubber-coated bullets, tear gas, stun grenades, as well

as skunk water.

At least 15 protesters were arrested, according to local media reports. The demonstration took place at the entrance to the Palestinian Bedouin village of Sa'wa at a main highway intersection on Route 31, east of Beer al-Sabe.

Huda Abu Obeid, a local activist, said the police attacked the protest shortly after it began. "They used a lot of violence, beatings; there are people injured and others detained," she told Al Jazeera.

The recent escalation began on Monday, when bulldozers from the Jewish National Fund (JNF), a quasi-governmental agency, arrived with heavy police protection in the nearby village of al-Atrash and razed Bedouin farming lands, in order to plant trees. Israeli officials said the land being planted is state-owned.

Bedouin Palestinians protested against the move and confrontations have continued for days. Videos and images shared on social media showed Israeli forces violently arresting and beating residents who arrived to defend the lands they use for farming wheat and barley.

At least seven people, including three children, were briefly detained on Monday and a local journalist was beaten. On Tuesday, Israeli forces demolished two sit-in tents in the villages of al-Atrash and al-Sa'wa, fired stun grenades and rubber-coated bullets, and arrested some 20 people. Villages were also shut off, with residents prevented from entering and exiting.

At least 80 Palestinians have been detained since the protests began, including minors, lawyers told Al Jazeera. The vast majority remain in detention.

Marwan Abu Freih, a lawyer representing some of the families and a field coordinator with the Adalah human rights group, said, "There is a clear escalation." "It is unprecedented that JNF bulldozers are arriving with this amount of protection – hundreds of police, special forces and mounted police – this has never happened here before," he told Al Jazeera.

He said police "blockaded villages, placed checkpoints and stopped traffic – prevented people from going home and school buses to enter and exit".

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