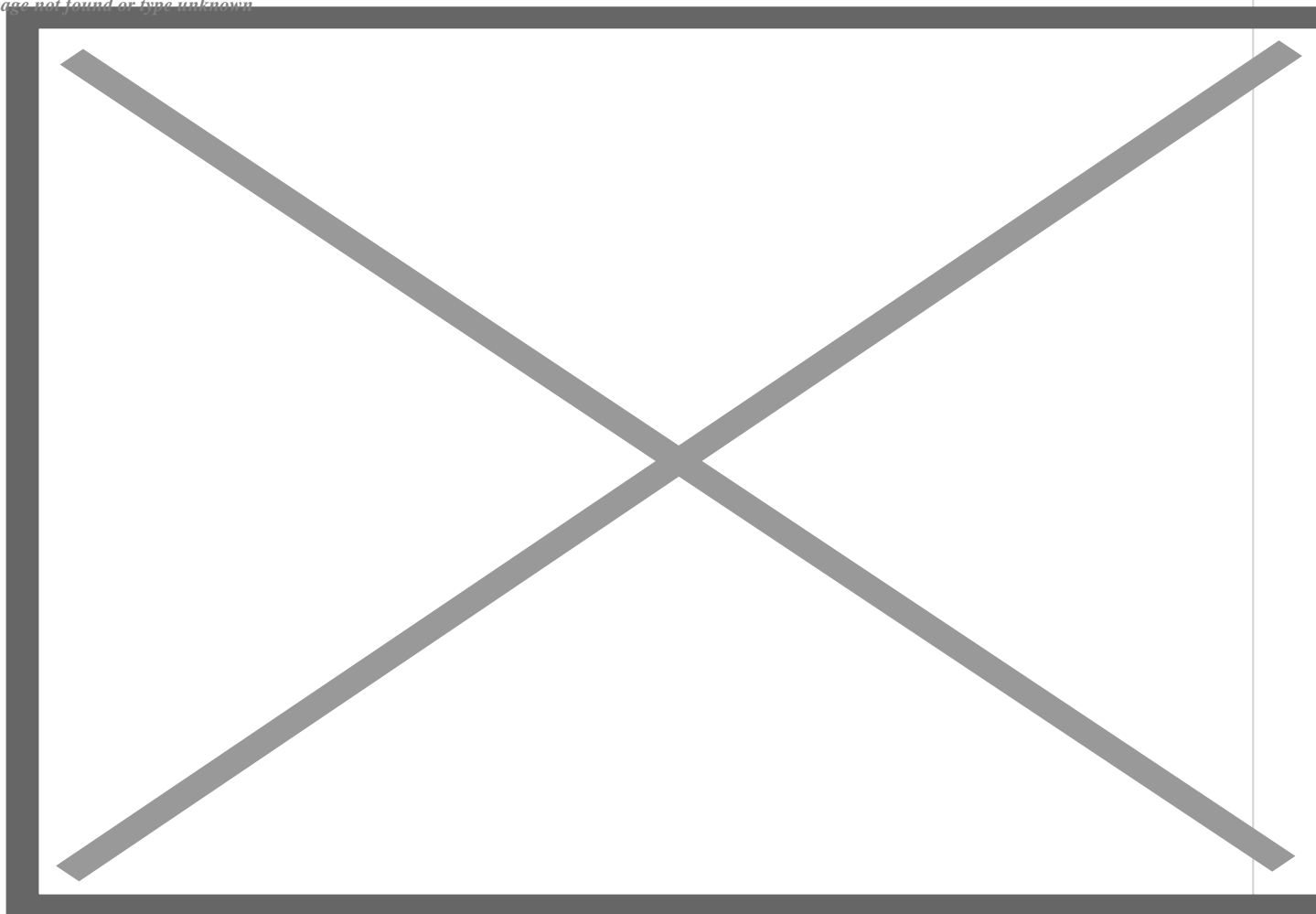


Israeli forces kill two Palestinians in occupied Nablus

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Nablus and its surrounding villages have been under a tight Israeli military blockade for more than two weeks [File: Alaa Badarneh /EPA-EFE]

Ramallah, October 28 (RHC)-- The Israeli army has shot and killed two Palestinian men at a military checkpoint south of Nablus in the occupied West Bank, according to Palestinian officials.

The Palestinian health ministry announced just before 2 am (11:00 GMT) on Friday that 47-year-old Imad Abu Rasheed was killed with bullets to his stomach, chest and head, with two others seriously wounded, at the Huwwara checkpoint on Route 60 in the northern occupied West Bank.

At 6:30 am (03:30 GMT), officials reported that Ramzi Sami Zabara, 35, had succumbed to his wounds from a bullet to the heart. The circumstances of their killing remain unclear. The Israeli army said in a statement that its forces were “carrying out an operation close to the Hawara checkpoint” and that they “identified two suspicious vehicles and fired at them,” according to Israeli media.

The identity of the other wounded man was not immediately known, but he was reported to be in a stable condition after undergoing surgery at Rafidia hospital in Nablus city in the northern occupied West Bank.

Both Zabara and Abu Rasheed worked for the Palestinian Authority’s Civil Defence, and lived in the Askar refugee camp on the eastern outskirts of Nablus. A Nablus-based journalist, Shadi Jarar’ah, told Al Jazeera that they were in a car, along with the wounded man, when they were shot at by Israeli forces.

Jarar’ah said Israeli forces also shot at and arrested a fourth man who was in a separate car at the checkpoint. A video shared by local media appeared to show Israeli soldiers transferring the body of a wounded Palestinian man on a stretcher into an ambulance.

The city of Nablus and its surrounding villages, home to some 420,000 people, have been under a tight Israeli military blockade for more than two weeks. Hours before Friday’s events, the Israeli army said it eased some restrictions on movement in and out of the Nablus area.

The siege was imposed as Israeli forces searched for suspects in an October 11 shooting in which one Israeli soldier was killed near the illegal Israeli settlement of Shavei Shomron, northwest of Nablus. The recently formed Lions’ Den, a small armed resistance group based in Nablus’s Old City, claimed responsibility, and the man who carried it out remains on the run.

Friday’s killings come days after the Israeli army launched a large raid into Nablus’s Old City and killed five Palestinian men, three of whom belonged to the Lions’ Den group. The two others were unarmed barbers on their way home from work when they were shot dead by Israeli special forces on the street.

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