Israeli settlers set mosque on fire in occupied West Bank

?The damaged mosque, burned by Israeli settlers, near Salfit in the Israeli-occupied West Bank December 20, 2024.   RETUERS/Stringer

Ramallah, December 20 (RHC)-- Israeli settlers have set fire to a mosque in the occupied West Bank, while also defacing the building's facade with hateful and racist slogans such as "Revenge" and "Death to Arabs" spray-painted in Hebrew.

Abdallah Kamil, the governor of Salfit, said on Friday that the attack targeted the Bar al-Walidain mosque in the village of Marda, in the latest incident of settler violence.

"A group of settlers carried out an attack early this morning by setting fire to the mosque," Kamil said in a statement. One resident of the village told AFP news agency that the settlers "set fire to the entrance of the mosque and wrote Hebrew slogans on its walls."

Another resident said the fire was extinguished before it could engulf the entire structure. Nasfat al-Khufash, head of the Marda village council, also confirmed the "systematic terror attack by a group of settlers", in an interview with Reuters news agency.

The Israeli settlements on Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank are considered illegal by the United Nations and under international law.

Governor Kamil said that settlers had previously entered the village "under the protection of the Israeli army", and that similar acts of vandalism and graffiti had been reported in nearby areas.

Palestine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ramallah condemned the incident, calling it a "blatant act of racism" and a reflection of the "widespread incitement campaigns against our people carried out by elements of the extremist right-wing ruling government" of Israel.

The Israeli police and Shin Bet security services said in a joint statement: "We see this incident as extremely serious and will act resolutely to bring the perpetrators to justice for rigorous trial."

Settler violence in the illegally occupied West Bank has intensified since the war in Gaza began on October 7 last year. As of October 2024, there have been at least 1,400 settler attacks in the West Bank.

Since the start of the war on Gaza, at least 803 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank by Israeli forces or settlers, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

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