

Israeli forces open fire on Palestinians, wounding hundreds



Tear gas canisters are dropped by an Israeli drone to disperse Palestinian demonstrators
[Mohamad Torokman/Reuters]

Ramallah, July 10 (RHC)-- Israeli forces opened fire on hundreds of Palestinian demonstrators who rallied against an illegal outpost in the occupied West Bank on Friday, with more than 370 people wounded

including 31 hit by live ammunition.

Drones dropped tear gas canisters and smoke filled the air at the scene of the protest in the West Bank town of Beita, near Nablus, where Palestinians protested illegal land confiscation.

Demonstrators burned tyres and threw rocks at Israeli forces, local media reports said. Witnesses said Israeli troops fired live rounds and rubber-coated steel bullets at the demonstrators after Friday prayers in Beita.

The Palestine Red Crescent reported 379 protesters were wounded – 31 by live ammunition. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. Similar confrontations were also witnessed in the town of Kafr Qaddum and in Beit Dajan, where dozens of Palestinians were treated for the effects of tear gas.

The Israeli army also suppressed a protest against the settlements in the Masafer Yatta area in Hebron. Israeli and Palestinian estimates indicate there are about 650,000 settlers in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, living in 164 settlements and 116 outposts. Under international law, all Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are illegal.

Tensions in the occupied West Bank reached new highs in the past several months with the Evyatar settlement being one of the focal points of clashes, as settlers refused to evacuate the land and Palestinians fiercely demonstrated against their presence.

In May, 34 Palestinians were killed – the highest monthly figure in 10 years – with Israel's domestic intelligence agency, the Shin Bet, reporting almost 600 violent incidents, as the Israeli military reinforced its presence in the occupied territories with several more battalions.

Palestinians in nearby villages say the Evyatar outpost was illegally built on their land and fear it will grow and merge with larger settlements nearby.

At least four protesters, including two teenagers, have been killed in the clashes in recent months. The settlers named the outpost Evyatar after an Israeli was killed – allegedly by a Palestinian – in 2013, and say it is home to dozens of families.

At the end of June, Israel reached a compromise with the settlers living in Evyatar. Under the agreement, the settlers left the outpost, and the area became a closed military zone, but the houses and roads remained in place.

Critics say the eviction did not reflect a change of Israeli policy. An Israeli government survey will be carried out that the settlers say will prove the outpost was not established on land privately owned by Palestinians. That would pave the way to establish a religious school and for some families to return.

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