

Palestinians condemn Israeli bill giving broad powers to police

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A billboard raised during protests against police indifference in the Palestinian town of Umm al-Fahm [File: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP]

Ramallah, October 20 (RHC)-- Israel is taking steps towards over-policing and increasing its surveillance of the Palestinian population inside its 1949-borders under the pretext of curbing the high crime rate within the community, Palestinians say.

In the latest measure, the Israeli cabinet approved a proposal on Sunday granting police with what Palestinians view as overly broad powers – allowing them to freely search homes without a court warrant

– “if they think they can find a suspect or evidence related to a serious crime”, according to Israeli media.

The bill, proposed by minister Gideon Saar, comes after a government decision last month to deploy the internal Israeli intelligence service, known as Shabak or Shin Bet, in Palestinian towns and villages as part of its “national fight against crime.”

With the cabinet’s support, the bill will be voted on in the Israeli parliament – the Knesset – before becoming a law. It is not yet clear whether the proposal will get a majority vote.

Hassan Jabareen, founder and director of Adalah, the main Palestinian legal defence organisation inside Israel, said the bill will give police the pretext to search any Palestinian home. “In practice, they will be able to go into the majority of Arab homes, because in every [Arab] neighborhood and town, there are shootings and killings,” Hassan told Al Jazeera. “It’s enough for them to be suspicious to do so.”

He said it means there would be “no judicial supervision” over the operation of entering into homes, which “strips homes of their sanctity.” “This will allow the police to even enter homes and use them for manoeuvring, for example, if they are suspicious of the house next door,” continued Hassan.

“We are going from under-policing to over-policing – one extreme to another,” adding the new legislation could be used to “terrorise people”, particularly during times of protest.

Awad Abdelfattah, a political writer and former general-secretary of the National Democratic Alliance party, said it “creates a state of tension” for Palestinians. “It will restrict our freedoms and put us under more surveillance,” he told Al Jazeera from the town of Kawkab near Haifa.

During the past decade, the issue of crime and homicides has plagued the Palestinian community inside Israel, referred to as the “1948-occupied territories” or the “occupied interior” by Palestinians.

The number of killings has risen dramatically over the past few years. So far in 2021, more than 100 Palestinians have been killed in homicides, surpassing last year’s total of 97. In 2013, there were 53 killings.

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