

Palestinians strike against Israeli siege on Jerusalem camp



Occupied Jerusalem, October 13 (RHC)-- Palestinians in the Shuafat refugee camp and surrounding neighbourhoods in occupied East Jerusalem have launched a general strike in protest against a days-long siege by Israeli forces that has affected severely access to basic services.

Stores and schools in the area remained shut on Wednesday, while labourers refused to go to work. Students at Birzeit University, in the Ramallah area, also boycotted classes in solidarity. The city of Nablus, in the northern occupied West Bank, also observed a general strike, while confrontations broke out with Israeli forces at checkpoints near Ramallah and Bethlehem, with several injuries from live ammunition reported. Israeli forces also fired tear gas at Shuafat refugee camp residents marching against the siege.

The camp, as well as the nearby neighbourhoods of Anata, Ras Khamis, Ras Shhadeh and Dahiyat al-Salam, is home to 130,000 Palestinians. Residents living there are fully encircled by Israel's Separation Wall and have only two exit and entry points in the form of permanently staffed Israeli border police

checkpoints. These have been shut down since Saturday night after an Israeli soldier was killed in a shooting attack.

Eleven Palestinians have so far been detained as Israeli police and special forces conduct raids and arrest operations while searching for a suspect, who they have identified as 22-year-old Uday Tamimi and say they believe he is trying to escape to the occupied West Bank.

Israeli forces raided the Shuafat refugee camp on Tuesday, during which confrontations broke out with Palestinian youths. At least one Palestinian was wounded by a bullet to the stomach, while dozens suffered injuries from tear gas inhalation and rubber-coated bullets, according to residents. Israeli forces also sprayed large amounts of skunk water – a foul-smelling liquid – on residents and homes in the tight alleyways of the camp.

Camp residents have announced a state of “civil disobedience”, while residents in Anata said in a statement that Palestinians must “act as one in order to break the siege”. In Nablus, the Lion’s Den armed group has also called for a day of general mobilisation and confrontations with Israeli forces in response to the continuing siege.

Access to basic services including health treatment, education, the entry of food supplies and waste collection have been severely hindered since the blockade began. UNRWA, the United Nations agency running the camp’s primary medical centre and in charge of education and waste collection, said the situation was “unacceptable”.

“Our ability to provide services – whether in education, health, or environmental health services – are between being disrupted or completely halted,” Kazem Abu Khalaf, a UNRWA spokesperson, told Al Jazeera.

“If people are able to enter, then exiting it is extremely difficult. We are in contact with Israeli authorities and we are telling them that this is unacceptable,” Abu Khalaf said. “They are imposing a closure on over 100,000 people. This is being described by many as collective punishment.

“We may be forced to implement measures we took during COVID-19, such as reverting education to being online, and begin delivering medicine, especially to elderly people, in their own homes,” Abu Khalaf added.

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