

Israeli army and settler attacks against Palestinians in West Bank increase



Ramallah, October 15 (RHC)-- As Israel continues to pummel the Gaza Strip from the sky, Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are gripped with tension and have reported an increase of attacks against them by settlers and soldiers alike.

According to human rights activist Samir Abu Shams, the Israeli army is in violation of multiple international laws, particularly the Geneva Conventions, which stress that civilians should be unharmed in situations of war and armed conflict.

"What we are seeing today is that the occupation forces enter civilian areas, create friction, and target civilians with gunfire without any justification," the 60-year-old from Tulkarem said. "Most of the cases of Israeli gunfire have been against Palestinian civilians passing through the street or going to their place of work."

On the one hand, Abu Shams went on to say, the Israeli occupation isolates the Gaza Strip from the West Bank. "On the other, it takes revenge on civilians in the occupied West Bank and takes measures to arm settlers and gives instructions to open fire on men, women, and children," he said.

On Friday, Karem al-Jallad was driving home from Tulkarem's vegetable market to his home in the southern district of the city at about 8:20pm (17:30 GMT). He was on the street near the Jewish settlement of Gishuri, which connects the west of Tulkarem to its south. Israeli soldiers fired at his car and al-Jallad, thinking it was sound bombs, kept driving. But he was hit three times by live ammunition: in the chest, hand, and shoulder.

"There were five bullets on the front of Karem's car," his cousin Alaa al-Jallad said to Al Jazeera. "Karem kept driving on the road until he reached the al-Safir roundabout, and from there he was transferred by ambulance to the local hospital," he said.

Karem's brother Ammar said he is undergoing a second operation. "Yesterday evening, the doctors took out the bullet that hit him in the shoulder and settled in the neck," Ammar said. "The second bullet caused a fracture and tear in the tendons, according to the doctors."

Ahmed Zahran of the Palestine Red Crescent Society in Tulkarem told Al Jazeera that Israeli soldiers shot at four civilian cars in the same area on Friday, killing one Palestinian and injuring seven others. A second Palestinian, 16, was shot on Friday and died the next day from his injuries.

"We headed there in our ambulance and saw a white Hyundai car that was shot at," Zahran said. "The four passengers were all injured, all in serious condition." His team transferred three of the wounded, and when they went back for the fourth Palestinian, the Israeli army targeted the medics and ambulance.

"We continued our work quickly, and at the same time we received a report of gunfire at another car about 30 metres (98 feet) away from us," Zahran said. "After identifying it, we found no casualties, only an empty car in the middle of the street, with no one in it."

They found Karem on the roundabout, and after transferring him to the hospital, they received another call that two other Palestinians were shot and injured while driving in their car as they passed by the settlement.

On Thursday evening, Randa Ajaj was in the car with her son Ismail and husband, who was driving back to Ramallah from the village of Yabrud. "At one of the checkpoints, a Jewish settler opened fire in the air," Ismail, 19, said. "We thought it was the soldiers so my father slowed down, but when we saw it was settlers with flashlights and guns, who tried to attack our car, my dad sped away."

The settlers opened fire. The first bullet hit Ismail in the foot then landed in his mother's body, where her kidney is. Randa, a mother of seven, had a few years earlier donated one of her kidneys to her brother.

A second bullet penetrated Ismail's shoulder, after shattering the back window.

Thinking Randa was just injured, the father continued driving and made it to a medical centre in the village of Silwad. From there, an ambulance took them to Ramallah Hospital.

"We thought she had fainted from fear because there were no traces of blood, but it turned out to be an explosive bullet that had penetrated my foot and landed in my mother," Ismail said, his voice breaking. "We didn't know that she had been killed."

Ismail couldn't continue the interview. He keeps watching videos of his mother's funeral on his phone since he couldn't attend, as he was in the hospital. "She was loved by everyone," her brother Abdullah said.

Taxi drivers working on the Nablus-Ramallah line have also lessened their movements, citing checkpoint closures and an increase in settler attacks. "There were 112 cars on the Nablus-Ramallah line before the war, and now there are only 25 cars driven by those from villages," Nael Dweikat, a 51-year-old driver, said.

"Most of the entrances to the Palestinian villages on this route are closed with dirt barriers, as people generally do not go out in their cars because of the increased danger unless it's absolutely necessary."

Dweikat said that drivers have to take an alternative route to leave Nablus instead of the main road, which is 45 minutes longer. "On Thursday, I was exposed to great danger during the funeral of the four Palestinians killed in the village of Qasra," he said. "By chance, I was at the al-Sawiya village junction at the same time as the funeral procession."

The settlers closed the road and attacked the procession, killing Ibrahim Al-Wadi and his son Ahmed. The road was completely closed for two hours. "I feel afraid and my nerves are high while travelling because the roads are not safe and the settlers block and attack Palestinian cars with stones at many intersections within the West Bank," Dweikat said. "Sometimes it takes some drivers five hours to get from one governorate to another."

For Abu Shams, the human rights activist, this is all part of a calculated Israeli plan to pressure and cause a displacement of the Palestinian population whether in the occupied West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

"It is not a hidden agenda," he said. "The Israel far-right ministers have announced more than once that they want a land without Palestinian residents, and they promised their voters, as part of their electoral campaigns, to implement that."

"In short, they want to implement a third Nakba by spreading chaos and disrupting Palestinian institutions in more than one place, especially those that provide services to society."

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