

Oscar-winning Palestinian director Hamdan Ballal released from detention



Ramallah, March 25 (RHC)-- Hamdan Ballal, the Palestinian co-director of the Oscar-winning documentary *No Other Land* who was detained by the Israeli army after being attacked by settlers, has been released.

In a post on social media platform X on Tuesday, his fellow co-director Yuval Abraham said: “After being handcuffed all night and beaten in a military base, Hamdan Ballal is now free and is about to go home to his family.”

The Associated Press news agency said its journalists had also seen Ballal and two other Palestinian people leaving the police station where they were being held in the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba in the occupied West Bank.

Ballal had bruises on his face and blood on his clothes, the AP reported. Ballal said he was held at an army base and forced to sleep under a freezing air conditioner. "I was blindfolded for 24 hours," he told AP.

"All the night I was freezing. It was a room, I couldn't see anything ... I heard the voice of soldiers laughing about me."

Lea Tsemel, the attorney representing the three men, said that they received only minimal care for their injuries from the attack and that she had no access to them for several hours after their arrest. She had earlier said they were accused of throwing stones at a young settler, allegations they deny.

Ballal and the other directors of *No Other Land*, which explores the struggles of living under Israeli occupation, had mounted the stage at the 97th Academy Awards in Los Angeles earlier this month when the film won the Oscar award for Best Documentary Feature.

On Monday, around two dozen settlers — some masked, some carrying guns and some in military uniforms — attacked the occupied West Bank village of Susiya in the evening as residents were breaking their fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Soldiers who arrived pointed their guns at the Palestinians, while settlers continued throwing stones, residents told the AP.

Lamia Ballal, the director's wife, said she heard her husband being beaten outside their home as she huddled inside with their three children. She heard him screaming, "I'm dying!" and calling for an ambulance.

When she looked out the window, she saw three men in uniform beating Ballal with the butts of their rifles and another person in civilian clothes who appeared to be filming the violence.

"Of course, after the Oscar, they have come to attack us more," Lamia said. "I felt afraid."

Human rights group Amnesty International called for accountability for the attack. "Hamdan Billal was forcibly disappeared by Israeli soldiers after having been assaulted by Israeli settlers attacking Palestinians ... He has now been released, but those who carried out the attacks must be held accountable," it said in a post on X.

Ballal said he was attacked by a well-known settler who had threatened him in the past. The settler can be seen with other masked men in a widely circulated video from August in which they threaten Ballal. "This is my land, I was given it by God," the settler says in the video, in which he also uses profanity and tries to get Ballal to fight him. "Next time it won't be nice," the settler says in the video.

On Tuesday, a small bloodstain could be seen outside Ballal's family home, and the car's windshield and windows were shattered. Neighbors pointed to a nearby water tank with a hole in the side that they said had been punched by the settlers.

Basel Adra — another of the film's co-directors, who is a prominent Palestinian activist in the area — said there has been a massive upswing in attacks by settlers and Israeli forces since the Oscar win. "Nobody can do anything to stop the pogroms, and soldiers are only there to facilitate and help the attacks," he said.

"We're living in dark days here, in Gaza, and all of the West Bank ... Nobody's stopping this."

The Israeli military said on Monday that it had detained three Palestinians suspected of hurling rocks at forces and one Israeli civilian involved in what it described as a violent confrontation.

[SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS]

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