

Israeli settlers uproot hundreds of Palestinian olive trees in occupied West Bank during harvest season

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Palestinians inspect their destroyed olive trees at the village of Qaryout near Nablus, the occupied West Bank. (File photo)

Ramallah, October 21 (RHC)-- Extremist Israeli settlers have attacked Palestinian-owned farming lands in the central part of the occupied West Bank, and uprooted more than 300 olive trees at the peak of olive harvest season.

Palestinian farmers from the village of al-Mazraa al-Garbieh, which lies north of the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, were shocked on Thursday by the sight of their olive groves vandalized on lands close to the illegal Israeli settlement of Kerem Reim.

Saadeh Zaqout, the head of the village's council, told official Palestinian Authority news agency WAFA that Israeli armed forces and settlers have installed an iron gate and placed cement blocks on the road to prevent Palestinian farmers from accessing their lands and harvesting olive trees.

The olive harvest season, which runs between October and November, is a lifeline for 80,000 to 100,000 Palestinian families in the West Bank. According to United Nations data, almost half of Palestinian agricultural lands are planted with an estimated 10 million olive trees in the West Bank and besieged Gaza Strip. Settlers time and again target the crops, setting fire to trees and poisoning plants.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said that more than 9,300 olive trees belonging to Palestinian farmers have been damaged, cut or uprooted by Israeli settlers between August 2020 and August 2021.

Rights group B'Tselem has, meanwhile, reported that 1,500 trees have been uprooted or damaged since the beginning of harvest season alone. Palestinian farmers reportedly suffered a 55-percent decrease in yield in the olive harvest between 2019 and 2020.

Most of the international community considers Israeli settlement construction illegal under international law and an obstacle to the so-called two-state solution to the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds. The UN Security Council has in several resolutions condemned the Tel Aviv regime's settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian lands.

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