

United Nations tells Israel to stop unlawful killings in West Bank

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Israel occupation troops raid West Bank (Photo> File)

Geneva, December 29 (RHC)-- The United Nations has called on Israel to end “unlawful killings” and settler violence in the occupied West Bank, warning of a rapidly deteriorating human rights situation during intensified Israeli raids.

In a report published on Thursday, the UN Human Rights Office detailed a “sharp increase” in air strikes and military incursions into densely populated refugee camps, resulting in deaths, injuries and widespread damage to civilian infrastructure in the occupied territory.

“The use of military tactics means and weapons in law enforcement contexts, the use of unnecessary or disproportionate force, and the enforcement of broad, arbitrary and discriminatory movement restrictions that affect Palestinians are extremely troubling,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said in a statement.

Violence across the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem has flared since Israel’s war on the Gaza Strip began on October 7. More than 21,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed, most of them civilians, after about 1,200 people were killed in Hamas attacks in southern Israel.

Since then, the UN has verified the deaths of at least 300 Palestinians in the West Bank, including 79 children, the report said. Of these, 291 were killed by Israeli forces, eight by settlers and one was killed by either soldiers or settlers.

Nearly 4,800 Palestinians have been arrested since the war of aggression on Gaza began. Since October 7th, the UN has documented a “sharp rise in settler attacks”, including “shootings, burning of homes and vehicles, and uprooting of trees.”

“I call on Israel to take immediate, clear and effective steps to put an end to settler violence against the Palestinian population, to investigate all incidents of violence by settlers and Israeli Security Forces, to ensure effective protection of Palestinian communities against any form of forcible transfer,” Turk said.

“The dehumanisation of Palestinians that characterises many of the settlers’ actions is very disturbing and must cease immediately,” his statement added.

Ajith Sunghay, the head of the UN Human Rights Office in the occupied Palestinian territories, told Al Jazeera that a lack of accountability – and in some cases incitement from Israeli officials – has led to a spike in both settler violence and violence committed by Israeli forces in the West Bank.

“I think that’s extremely important to underscore – where there is impunity violations will continue to happen,” Sunghay said. “These statements [from Israeli officials] embolden settlers, give them a sense of security. It gives them a certain kind of permission to do what they want to do,” he added.

The report was released as Israeli forces began one of the largest incursions in the West Bank since the war started, launching a coordinated overnight assault on 10 cities, including Ramallah, the administrative headquarters of the Palestinian Authority.

The raids, which continued until early on Thursday, targeted Palestinian money exchange outlets. A Palestinian man was also killed by Israeli forces on Thursday near a checkpoint west of the city of Bethlehem.

Mustafa Barghouti, the general secretary of the Palestinian National Initiative party, believes the growing raids in the West Bank are an attempt by Israel to reoccupy the territory “completely”.

“They are marginalising the Palestinian Authority, depriving it of all its authorities,” Barghouti told Al Jazeera.

“There is no security control by the Palestinian Authority because the Israeli army invades all cities, all [of] Area A that was supposed to be under the Palestinian Authority,” he said.

“This is a clear message from [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu. He’s saying there’s no place any more for any independent Palestinian authority here. He’s reoccupying the West Bank as he is trying to reoccupy Gaza.”

Barghouti added that despite the Israeli claims that its raids are to fight against “terrorism”, the real goal is to “provoke an intifada [uprising]”.

“Netanyahu knows very well if he leaves his position as prime minister, he will go to jail,” he said, referring to the corruption charges the Israeli leader is now on trial for. “This man wants to extend the war in Gaza, to expand it, to continue it as long as possible.”

Also on Thursday, UNICEF said 2023 has been the deadliest year for children in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem with 124 Palestinian and six Israeli children killed there since the start of the year.

“At least 83 children have been killed in the past 12 weeks – more than double the number of children killed in all of 2022, amid increased military and law enforcement operations,” Adele Khodr, UNICEF’s regional director for the Middle East and North Africa said in a statement. “More than 576 have been injured, and others have reportedly been detained.”

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