



Implausible deniability – Israeli Government support of settler violence against Palestinians

February 2022

"The settlers terrorising the Palestinians, the land grabbing, the demolition of houses, destruction of olive trees for the farmers and the restriction of movement. All this is really bringing despair to the people, and many have lost hope.

In every aspect of my life, and in all possible and difficult situations, I try to do the will of God, remembering the message of Jesus Christ in Luke 4:18."

Nora Carmi, Palestinian Christian peace activist

"Now, it is up to us to be the peacemakers and initiate change. Each of us is called to do something. We cannot sit and wait for God or Joe Biden to change things. Instead of just managing the conflict under occupation, we must think outside the box and find creative ways towards real change on the ground for the Palestinian people."

Rev Mitri Raheb, president of Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem

Previous Synod meetings of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania have committed the Synod to seek to contribute to a just peace in the Israel – Palestine conflict.

In November 2021, the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem released a report entitled 'State Business. Israel's misappropriation of land in the West Bank through settler violence'. The report documented that the Israeli Government has allowed more than 280 settlements to be built by Israelis in the West Bank. The settlements have an estimated population of 440,000 settlers. These settlements have usually seized Palestinian land.

In some cases, the appropriation of the land has been through official means, including issuing military orders, deeming land to be owned by the State of Israel and establishing nature reserves. Other areas have been seized by settlers using violence against the Palestinians who owned the land. The report stated that the Israeli Government took over more than 200,000 hectares of Palestinian land. The land has been used to build new settlements and expand existing ones.

The B'tselem report concluded that settler violence to seize Palestinian land was a "major informal tool at the hands of the state to take over more and more West Bank land. The state fully supports and assists these acts of violence, and its agents sometimes participate in them directly."

The Israeli Government assists the establishment of settlements by Israelis that are established in violation of Israel's laws. The Israeli Government has ordered its military to defend these illegal settlements, paid for their security, paved roads and laid down water and electricity infrastructure for most of them. In addition, it has provided legal support when unlawful Israeli settlements are legally challenged.

The Israeli Government has removed three settlements (Migron, Amona and part of Derech HaAvot) after years of litigation, including High Court petitions filed with the help of Israeli human rights organisations.

Israeli settlers have been free to beat Palestinians, threaten them, burn their fields, destroy or steal their crops, damage homes and cars and, in rare cases, murder them. Israeli soldiers do not prevent violence by settlers against Palestinians and sometimes actively participate themselves.

From the beginning of 2020 to the end of September 2021, B'Tselem documented 451 settler attacks on Palestinians and their property. The figure excludes attacks in the Jordan valley, where violence happens daily. The attacks included 180 physical assaults, 145 that resulted in property damage and 123 that damaged crops or trees used in agricultural production. Israeli security forces assisted settlers in the attacks in 104 of the cases, and in 66 they were present but did



nothing to stop the settler violence. In addition, five Palestinians were murdered in joint attacks by settlers and Israeli soldiers.

Indictments are hardly ever filed against settlers who harm Palestinians. The offences are usually downgraded to minor matters with token penalties when a charge is filed. Convictions of settlers are rare.

"In May 2021, I took the sheep out to graze in an area east of Far'ata, and three settlers attacked me. One of them threw a stone at my head. I managed to hide in a bale of straw, and the settlers thought I was dead and left. My sheep went home alone, and I only went back after the settlers had gone. Then my family took me to a hospital in Qalqiliyah. I got seven stitches and stayed home for about two weeks."

Testimony of Muhammad Salman, aged 73 to B'Tselem

B'Tselem concluded that:

When the violence occurs with permission and assistance from the Israeli authorities and under its auspices, it is state violence. The settlers are not defying the state; they are doing its bidding.

In addition, Defence for Children International Palestine reported on 10 December 2021 that 86 Palestinian children have been killed in the Occupied Territory since January 2021. Thus, 2021 was the deadliest year on record for Palestinian children since 2014. Israeli security forces were responsible for 76 of the deaths. Israeli civilians killed two Palestinian children. Rockets fired by Palestinian terrorist groups killed seven Palestinian children.

As an example of one such case, Imad Khaled Saleh Hashash, aged 15, was shot in the head and killed at 4 am on 24 August 2021. Israeli security forces raided the Balata refugee camp at 3 am. After being woken by gunshots, Imad and his brother went to the roof of their home to observe the raid. Imad took out his phone to record the attack and was shot in the head.

What You Can Do

Write a polite and respectful letter to:

Mr Ron GERSTENFELD
Minister, Counsellor for Israel
Embassy of Israel
6 Turrana Street
Yarralumla, ACT, 2600

Email: info@canberra.mfa.gov.il

Salutation: Dear Mr Gerstenfeld

Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern at the evidence that the Israeli Government assists the violent seizure of Palestinian land by Israeli settlers in the West Bank.
- Ask that the Israeli Government uphold the law and properly prosecute Israeli settlers who assault Palestinians and damage their property, as well as any soldiers that join in on such settler attacks.
- Point out that lasting and just peace will not be possible unless the Israeli Government upholds the human rights of all people.
- Further, ask what action has been taken to investigate the shooting death of Imad Khaled Saleh Hashash on 24 August 2021 by Israeli security forces in the Balata refugee camp.

Acknowledgement: Material in this action was taken from Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem and Defence for Children International Palestine.