

# Settlers in Uniform

Violence Against Palestinians by Israelis  
in Military Uniforms



December 2025



# Settlers in Uniform

## Violence Against Palestinians by Israelis in Military Uniforms



**Research and writing:** Yonatan Kanonich

**Editing:** Shira Livne, Dan Owen, Ziv Stahl

**Legal counsel:** Adv. Roni Pelli, Adv. Michael Sfard

**Hebrew language editing:** Noa Cohen

**Translation:** Maya Johnston

**Graphic design:** Studio Yuda Dery

**Yesh Din volunteers:** Dahlia Amit, Maya Bailey, Hanna Barag, Drora Beit-Or, Osnat Ben-Shachar, Rochale Chayut, Dr. Yehudit Elkana, Rahel Gershuni, Rony Gilboa, Hana Gottlieb, Tami Gross, Dina Hecht, Niva Inbar, Daniel A. Kahn, Edna Kaldor, Ruth Kedar, Dr. Joel Klimes, Bentzi Laor, Aryeh Magal, Sarah Marliss, Lidor Rosman, Ilana Meki Shapira, Amir Pansky, Naama Patenkin, Talia Pecker Berio, Nava Polak, Eddie Saar, Idit Schlesinger, Dr. Tzvia Shapira, Rivi Sherman, Sara Toledano, Dina Yefermov, Ella Weiss, Yoram Zeevi.

**Staff:** Firas Alami, Yudit Avidor, Danya Cohen, Noa Cohen, Yahav Erez, Reema Hawwash, Tamari Kadman, Moneer Kadus, Yonatan Kanonich, Shira Livne, Dan Owen, Oded Paporish, Adv. Roni Pelli, Adv. Fadia Qawasmi, Adv. Michael Sfard, Adv. Joman Shadad, Ziv Stahl, Adv. Shlomy Zachary, Adv. Lior Zur.

**Yesh Din's activity in 2025 was supported by:**

ACPP, AECID (Spanish Development Corporation), CAFOD – The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, The European Union, The Foundation for Middle East Peace (FMEP), Irish Aid, Majalat, Misereor (German Catholic Bishops' Organisation), The Netherlands, The New Israel Fund (NIF), The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Pro Victimis, The Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF), The Royal Norwegian Embassy, The Sigrid Rausing Trust, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

---

**Cover: A member of the Revava settlement emergency response team fires in the air over Palestinian and Israeli olive harvesters, Qarawat Bani Hassan, November 4, 2025 (photo: Eyal Warshavsky), see p. 22**

Yesh Din is primarily funded by foreign governmental entities. A list of our donors is available on the Israeli Associations Register's website and on our website. Yesh Din is proud to be funded by states that believe, as we do, that the occupation is not an internal Israeli matter and that support the advancement of human rights.



<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>The Principle of Distinction</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Regional Defense Units</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Civilian Security Coordinators and Emergency Response Teams</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Emergency Response Teams</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Inherent Conflict of Interest</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Settlers in Uniform</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>A Policy of Non-Enforcement</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>40</b>

# Introduction

In recent years, and particularly since the outbreak of the war in Gaza in October 2023, numerous acts of violence against Palestinians in the West Bank have been carried out by Israeli settlers dressed in military uniforms. These incidents have included shootings, physical assaults, trespassing, theft, and property damage, among other offenses.

The term “settlers in uniform” describes a pervasive pattern in the West Bank, in which the basic, substantive distinction between civilians and members of security forces is obscured. That is, there is no clear distinction between private individuals who are subject to the rule of law and personnel authorized to use force in the context of law enforcement.

Blurred lines between the civilian and military spheres in Israel are intrinsic to the enmeshment of the country’s military with its civilian population. However, in the West Bank, where a regime of control and oppression of one national group over another is in place, this obfuscation is deliberate, and it produces a destructive reality for the Palestinian population in the occupied territory.

A key driver of ‘settlers in uniform’ is Israel’s security doctrine known as regional defense. Under it, reserve battalions known as regional defense units, made up mainly of settlers, are stationed in the West Bank. They work alongside settlement-based civilian security coordinators and emergency response teams, which are funded, trained, equipped and armed by the Ministry of Defense and the military.

Once the war in Gaza began, thousands of settlers were called up for reserve duty in the regional defense units and in West Bank settlement emergency response teams. Some 8,000 firearms were distributed to Israeli civilians living in the West Bank, including individuals who were not called up for military service. Many of these weapons remain in settlers’ hands to this day.<sup>1</sup>

With masses of settlers recruited and armed to serve as the long arm of the military, military uniforms have been used to carry out premeditated criminal acts against Palestinians. This report identifies and analyzes how Israeli civilians exploit the power and authority that come with military uniforms and firearms in order to commit offenses and harm Palestinians. The report does not claim to assess Israel’s security doctrine in the occupied territories, which relies significantly on settlers, or its merit, but rather bring to light the dangerous implications of this mode of operation and the absence of

---

1 Elisha Ben Kimon and Einav Halabi, “Arrests, Distribution of Weapons and a Battle Over the Olive Harvest in Judea and Samaria,” **ynet**, November 6, 2023 (Hebrew); **IDF website**, “Activities of IDF Forces in Central Command Since the Beginning of the Year: the Figures,” December 19, 2024 (Hebrew).

oversight mechanisms, and warn of its severe impact on the human rights of Palestinians in the West Bank.

The first two sections of the report focus on settlers who belong to regional defense units or emergency response teams and use the uniforms and firearms they receive from the state outside their assigned areas or in a manner that exceeds their authority. The third section outlines the spread of these practices to settlers who are not in military service, but use uniforms to harm Palestinians in the West Bank. This division is used as a way of presenting the different facets of the issue, but it does not necessarily mirror reality on the ground, where no clear separation exists: settlers can simultaneously belong to both a regional defense unit and an emergency response team, and may also act on their own initiative, outside of any military activity, while wearing uniforms.

The incidents featured in the report are only a tiny sample of a multifaceted practice used to illustrate how settlers in uniform harm Palestinians: a soldier on leave who decides to put on a uniform and use a firearm; a civilian security coordinator who operates outside their assigned area; regional defense soldiers who exceed their authority; or settlers who impersonate soldiers. In practice, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between a regional defense soldier, a member of an emergency response team or a settler who independently decided to put on a uniform. It is certainly impossible to know whether the person is a soldier on active reserve duty or a civilian who put on a uniform and decided to take the law into their own hands. As far as Palestinian victims know, their assailants are Israelis in uniform, representing the law in the occupied territory.

Israeli authorities, for their part, encourage 'settler in uniform' violence against Palestinians not only by distributing uniforms and firearms, but also by failing to enforce the law on offenders. When complaints are filed against these assailants, law enforcement authorities usually attempt to evade their responsibility to investigate the incident. The Military Advocate General's Corps claims the violence was not carried out in the course of military activity and, therefore, the incident does not fall under its jurisdiction. The Israel Police, on the other hand, closes investigation files or claims it has no jurisdiction to investigate because the acts were perpetrated by people in military uniform.

Settlers in Uniform demonstrates that Israel consistently, and as a matter of policy, enables the deliberate blurring of lines between settlers and military forces and promotes violent actions against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank by militias working in the service of settlement interests. These practices run counter to Israel's obligations under international law as the occupying power in the West Bank and gravely violate the human rights of Palestinians living there.

## The Principle of Distinction

Military uniforms are intended to serve as a means of identification and to clarify that the person wearing them belongs to the armed forces of a particular state. The legal status of combatant, which, under International Humanitarian Law, grants the right to participate in hostilities, is subject to certain conditions, including having “a fixed distinctive sign recognizable at a distance,” that is, one that distinguishes them from the civilian population. This most commonly means a military uniform.<sup>2</sup> The absence of a military uniform usually indicates that the person is not a combatant but a civilian, and, therefore, may not engage in military activity.

Organized armed groups composed of people who are not soldiers, that is, civilian militias, sometimes use military-style uniforms for purposes of identification, obedience, comradeship and a display of power, among others. Sometimes, militias imitate the official armed forces and wear military uniforms in order to command authority and gain legitimacy.<sup>3</sup>

The principle of distinction is a fundamental principle of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and it is enshrined in Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions. Commentary on the principle of distinction refers to two major aspects: first, in a situation of hostilities, the parties must distinguish between civilians and civilian objects on the one hand, and soldiers and military objectives on the other, and refrain from directly attacking civilian objects. Second, the parties to the hostilities must avoid actions that may blur the distinction between civilians and combatants.<sup>4</sup>

Israeli civil and military law likewise prohibit unauthorized persons from wearing full or partial military or police uniforms.<sup>5</sup> Thus, wearing uniforms outside a recognized and official military framework, as described in this report, is meant to create the false appearance of military activity and is an element of the criminal act.

---

2 **Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Geneva, 12 August 1949**, Art. 4; **Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977** (hereinafter: **Protocol I**), Art. 50.

3 Toni Pfanner, “Military uniforms and the law of war,” **International Review of the Red Cross**, Vol. 86 No. 853, March 2004.

4 **Protocol I**, Arts. 48, 51(2), 52(2); ALMA – Association for the Promotion of International Humanitarian Law, “The Principle of Distinction” (Hebrew).

5 **Penal Law, 1977**, Sec. 217 (Hebrew); **Military Justice Law, 1955**, Sec. 518(b) (Hebrew).



Armed Israelis – a settler in uniform, a settler in civilian clothing and soldiers – on land belonging to the town of Beit Ula in the West Bank, November 2025. Photo: Mosab Shawer/Activestills.

## Regional Defense Units

In the early years of Israeli independence, residents of border communities were relied upon to join military forces in times of war and help them repel an invasion by enemy forces. After the capture of the West Bank, the military applied the security concept known as regional defense to the occupied territory as well.

In addition to the permanent presence of Israeli regular and reserve soldiers in the West Bank as part of the occupation regime, reserve battalions known as regional defense units also operate in the area. These units' personnel are mainly settlers who are called up for reserve duty. The military provides them with uniforms, equipment and firearms, and their official role is to "provide defense in emergencies, in the form of anything between operations inside the settlement, patrols in the settlement's external security perimeter and even stakeouts and ambushes."<sup>6</sup> Every settlement in the West Bank has a regional defense platoon, most of whose personnel are residents of that settlement. Individuals serving in the regional defense units are required to wear army uniforms during military activity and are not permitted to use these uniforms off duty.

Like all soldiers in the occupied territory, members of the regional defense units must comply with IHL, which requires them to ensure public order and safety in the occupied territory, protect the local Palestinian population and uphold its rights. Soldiers are permitted to exercise their powers only for the benefit of the occupied territory and for security purposes, while applying only relevant considerations – the interests of the protected residents on the one hand and security interests on the other.<sup>7</sup>

In October 2023, the military diverted many troops from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip, and the regional defense battalions recruited thousands of additional settlers in an expedited process. In the early months of the war, the regional defense units increased by a factor of up to six, numbering about 7,000 armed settlers. The change in the makeup of the Israeli military in the West Bank resulted in regional defense units undertaking more offensive operations, going out on vehicle patrols, setting up checkpoints and carrying out "offensive actions in the heart of the villages in the sector."<sup>8</sup>

6 "The Shomron Brigade Territorial Defense Battalion Chosen as the Outstanding Battalion of Judea and Samaria," **IDF Website**, September 22, 2020 (Hebrew); Elad Huminor, "Preparations for Extreme Scenarios in Judea and Samaria: 'We Drill for This all the Time,'" **Kipa**, December 24, 2023 (Hebrew).

7 **Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907**, Art. 43; HCJ 393/82, **Jam'iat Iskan Al-Ma'almoon Al-Ta'awonia Al-Mahduda Al-Mas'ouliya v. Commander of IDF Forces in the Judea and Samaria Area** et al., judgment dated December 28, 1983 (Hebrew); note also that all Israeli settlements and outposts in the West Bank are a violation of international law (**Fourth Geneva Convention**, Art. 49).

8 Hagar Shezaf, "Israel's Army Drafted and Armed Thousands of Settlers. Accounts of Their Violence Are Piling Up," **Haaretz English Edition**, January 17, 2024; Shilo Fried, "Territorial Defense Combatants will be Recognized as

Settlers serving as soldiers in the regional defense units are regular reserve soldiers in every respect, and the actions of these units are carried out in an official military capacity and should be regulated by military law. However, the rapid, large-scale mobilization significantly amplified irregularities and issues already present in these units, led to numerous breaches of law and caused harm to Palestinians living in the West Bank.

Deploying settler-soldiers from the regional defense units in the vicinity of their home settlements and outposts creates an inherent conflict of interest. One way in which the Israeli settlement enterprise in the West Bank pursues expansion and prosperity is through seizing Palestinian land. The interests guiding a military force composed entirely of settlers are, therefore, in conflict with the military's duty to protect the rights of the Palestinian population.

It is important to note that even in ordinary times, when "regular" soldiers are charged with maintaining public order and safety in the West Bank, they will demonstrate a bias towards Israeli settlers and against Palestinians. Settlers turned law enforcers in places where they are in constant conflict with Palestinians clearly have a personal interest that can serve as an indication of how events will unfold.

In an interview on an Israeli TV news magazine, a lieutenant colonel serving in the Central Command explained how settlers from the regional defense units are involved in establishing unauthorized shepherding outposts:

The army assigns regional defense soldiers for this. These are soldiers who mostly live on the farms themselves or in nearby communities, and they are reserve soldiers. [...] Every farm has at least four or five of them. [...] **And it doesn't end with guarding the farms themselves. The friction this creates in the area often leads to a loss of control.** [...] The military knowingly gets itself involved in a situation that's illegal and isn't its role.<sup>9</sup>

Not only do many of the regional defense unit soldiers lack training and qualifications for operational activity vis-à-vis the Palestinian civilian population, but these units have also recruited settlers with criminal records and a history of assaults and violence against Palestinians. The availability of uniforms and firearms has given a vast number of settlers, some of them with a history of ideologically motivated offenses, the opportunity to engage in illegal acts against Palestinians, using military equipment, whether by abusing their powers while on duty or off duty altogether.

---

a Combat Array and Receive Reserve Benefits," **Makor Rishon**, January 9, 2024 (Hebrew); Oz Yisrael Schwartz, "Deputy Commander of the Yehuda Territorial Defense Battalion: The Hebron Sector Never Fell Asleep," **Srugim**, May 2, 2024 (Hebrew); Noya Ben Gigi, "Territorial Defense Combatants in the Judea and Samaria Division go out for Their First Break," **IDF website**, May 8, 2024 (Hebrew); Hagar Shezaf, "IDF Blocks Palestinians From Using Key West Bank Road While Israeli Settlers Drive Freely," **Haaretz English Edition**, August 21, 2025.

9 Zman Emet, "The landlords," Season 9, Episode 10, **Kan**, December 8, 2025 (emphasis added) (Hebrew).

## “They went from house to house and destroyed everything”

In December 2023, regional defense soldiers took part in a raid on the village of Khirbet Khilet a-Dabe in South Mount Hebron, alongside reserve soldiers from other units. J., a resident of the village, told Yesh Din that initially, soldiers who “behaved well, did a search and left,” arrived, “but then,” J. continued, “the settlers came. They were masked, but I recognized one of them, who is particularly violent and known throughout the area.” The settler-soldiers swore at members of the household, threatened them at gunpoint, and conducted a violent search during which “they turned everything upside down, broke the light fixtures, destroyed the solar panels and damaged the water pipe. [...] They went from house to house and destroyed everything. They gathered all the residents in one structure. They took my cousin to the bathroom and beat him there.” After the intruders left, the residents discovered that the settlers had damaged the village’s water main and that a generator and tools had been stolen, along with money and gold worth tens of thousands of Israeli shekels.<sup>10</sup>



**Khirbet Khilet a-Dabe after the raid by settler-soldiers on the village, December 2023 (photo courtesy of village residents)**

The deliberate blurring, in both appearance and conduct, between soldiers and civilians has made it difficult to identify the attackers. Many Palestinians have told Yesh Din that they noticed a change in the clothing and behavior of uniformed men, but naturally could

<sup>10</sup> J. to Yesh Din, December 2023; Hagar Shezaf, “Israel’s Army Drafted and Armed Thousands of Settlers. Accounts of Their Violence Are Piling Up,” **Haaretz English Edition**, January 17, 2024.

not determine which unit they belonged to. However, the military's response to some of the incidents suggests a broad pattern of criminal harm to Palestinians by settlers drafted into regional defense units, both in the course of official military missions and when acting on their own initiative and without authority, behind the shield of military uniforms and firearms.

For example, in December 2023, a settler from a regional defense unit, wearing a partial uniform, entered a Palestinian shepherding community near the outpost where he lives in the Jordan Valley, claiming sheep had been stolen from him. The settler-soldier fired his military gun and even entered homes in the community.<sup>11</sup> In August 2024, soldiers from a regional defense unit near the settlement of Efrat shot and killed Khalil Salam Halawi, a 40-year-old resident of East Jerusalem, and moderately wounded three others. The head of the Wadi Rahal Village Council told Haaretz that "the incident began when the settlers, who were not in IDF uniforms, entered the village, attacked cars and residential homes, and later, opened fire indiscriminately. A source inside the security establishment told Haaretz that the territory defense soldiers' presence in the area was "against policy, as they were outside the boundaries of their sector," and that the command had not instructed them to go to the scene of the incident."<sup>12</sup>

In the early afternoon of December 25, 2025, a regional defense soldier on active reserve duty entered the village of Deir Jarir in civilian clothing and opened fire, injuring two Palestinians. Shortly afterwards, the same soldier was filmed riding an ATV and deliberately running over a Palestinian who was praying by the side of the road. The army stated in its response that "the person in question is a reserve soldier who opened fire while wearing civilian clothes, in grave breach of his authority."<sup>13</sup> The military confiscated the soldier's firearm, and he was relieved of his duties, but not arrested.<sup>14</sup> The military claimed that "the matter has been handed over to the Israel Police," but the police said the case involved "an on-duty IDF soldier – this is the jurisdiction of the Military Police Criminal Investigations Division."<sup>15</sup> The police finally took the settler-soldier into custody for questioning hours after the incident, and he was released the next morning into house arrest for five days.<sup>16</sup>

---

11 Hagar Shezaf, "Settler on Reserve Duty Fired at Palestinians, Claiming They Stole Sheep from Him," **Haaretz**, December 1, 2023 (Hebrew).

12 Hagar Shezaf and Jack Khoury, "Palestinian Killed in West Bank by IDF Reservists, According to the Army," **Haaretz English Edition**, August 27, 2024.

13 idfonline@, Israel Defense Forces, **X**, December 25, 2025 (at 18:50) (Hebrew).

14 Matan Golan, "IDF Reservist Caught on Video Driving Tractor Over Palestinian Praying on West Bank Road," **Haaretz English Edition**, December 25, 2025.

15 @Doron\_Kadosh, Doron Kadosh – military correspondent for Army Radio, **X**, December 25, 2025 (at 19:31) (Hebrew).

16 Haim Goldich, "Reservist suspected of running over a Palestinian worshipper released to house arrest," **Kan**, December 26, 2025 (Hebrew).

## The soldiers and settlers stayed in the village for more than four hours

In March 2025, a military force that included regular and regional defense soldiers raided the village of Khirbet Jenbah in South Mount Hebron. The invading troops were joined by Israeli settlers in civilian clothes. The soldiers and settlers stayed in the village for more than four hours, broke into homes, destroyed food and belongings and terrorized the residents. A., a 63-year-old resident of Jenbah, told Yesh Din: “At 8:30 A.M., I went out to the outhouse. Suddenly, I came across three masked settlers holding clubs, iron bars and pepper spray canisters. The settler closest to me lunged at me and hit me in the head with an iron bar. I fell to the ground and passed out.”



**'A. after surgery to repair a skull fracture caused by Israelis in Jenbah (photo courtesy of the family)**

K., 'A.'s son, added: “I saw three settlers attacking my father. Four other settlers, all of them masked, came at me and beat me with iron bars. I saw that one of the settlers was holding a large stone in his hand. They pounced on me. One settler grabbed me, and the other hit me with a bar. I fell to the ground, and they kept beating me all over my body. I saw my younger brother coming out of the house, and then four more settlers lunged at him and beat him. More settlers arrived, broke into the house and smashed everything they could.”<sup>17</sup>

The assault on 'A. and his family was carried out by settlers who were not wearing military uniforms. One of them, a minor, was indicted.<sup>18</sup> Regional defense soldiers

<sup>17</sup> 'A. and K. to Yesh Din, April 2025.

<sup>18</sup> CrimC 15134-4-25, pending before the Be'er Sheva Juvenile Court.

were present in Jenbah during the incident and took part in the violence instead of preventing it, as they are obligated to do. A military inquiry found that the regional defense soldiers had participated in the operation in breach of regulations, that the troops needlessly destroyed property and conducted a search in the school without authority. The GOC Central Command ordered disciplinary action against the soldiers involved.<sup>19</sup>

As noted, these are only a handful of examples, and it is difficult to assess the total number of unlawful incidents of violence against Palestinians in the West Bank involving regional defense soldiers, in and out of uniform. Regional defense soldiers are subject to military law, and accordingly, law enforcement in their case is the purview of the Military Police Criminal Investigations Division (MPCID) and the Military Advocate General's (MAG) Corps.

Responding to reports that settlers recruited into regional defense battalions had harassed Palestinians, fired at them and detained them without cause, the military's spokesperson claimed that "regional defense combatants have been operating continuously to provide security in the area and to thwart terrorist attacks. In cases where the combatants, who, as noted, were called up for reserve duty, exceeded their authority, command measures were taken against them, including termination of their reserve service."<sup>20</sup>

To Yesh Din's knowledge, not a single indictment has been filed against any of the settler-soldiers who served in the regional defense units in the West Bank over the past two years for criminal acts against Palestinians.

---

19 Nir Hasson, "Over 100 Israeli Soldiers, Settlers Raid Village in West Bank's Masafer Yatta, Locals Say," **Haaretz English Edition**, March 29, 2025; Uriel Philip, "Unusual: IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir visited Hebron to Investigate Damage to Palestinian Property," **Behadrei Haredim**, March 31, 2025 (Hebrew).

20 Nurit Yohanan, "Gunfire in agricultural areas and arrests without the army's knowledge in Samaria," **Kan**, June 5, 2024 (Hebrew).

# Civilian Security Coordinators and Emergency Response Teams

Settlement emergency response teams and their leaders, civilian security coordinators (CSCs) serve as another arm in Israel's security doctrine known as regional defense. Following the capture of the West Bank, two military orders regulated the powers of CSCs and emergency response teams in the settlements: Order regarding the Regulation of Security Guarding in Communities and Order regarding Civil Defense.<sup>21</sup>

CSCs are Israeli civilians, usually settlers, who are responsible for all aspects of security in a settlement. They lead the settlement's emergency response team, oversee its training, and have the authority to distribute military firearms to civilians, including individuals who are not members of the emergency response team. The CSCs maintain close contact with security forces operating in the settlement area, brief soldiers and security guards arriving on duty, and supply equipment to regional defense soldiers in states of alert and during wartime. The Order regarding the Regulation of Security Guarding in Communities grants CSCs extensive powers within the spaces assigned to them. CSCs have powers mirroring those of police officers, including, among other things, the power to detain, search, and arrest. They have also been authorized to use force as part of their duties.<sup>22</sup>

Despite their broad powers, the military order does not require CSCs to wear a tag identifying them by name, as police officers are required to do. However, directives issued by the State Attorney's Office in 2006 require CSCs to wear identifying uniforms, vests and hats, bearing the inscription CSC in Hebrew.<sup>23</sup> CSCs are not permitted to wear military uniforms, except when called up for reserve duty and operating in the line of duty.

The CSCs' "guarding zones," the areas where they are permitted to operate and exercise their powers, were initially defined as the municipal boundaries of the settlement in which they serve. Since 2009, however, these areas may also include land lying outside settlement jurisdictions, such as areas where unauthorized outposts have been built, as well as privately owned Palestinian land.<sup>24</sup> The authorization granted by the military commander to Israeli settlers to exercise policing and enforcement powers on privately owned Palestinian land carries with it the potential for severe human rights violations,

---

21 **Order regarding Regulation of Security Guarding in Communities (Judea and Samaria) (No. 432), 1971** (Hebrew); **Order regarding Civil Defense (Judea and Samaria) (No. 1699), 2012** (Hebrew).

22 Yesh Din, [The Lawless Zone: The transfer of policing and security to the civilian security coordinators in the settlements and outposts](#) (June 2014).

23 Ibid.

24 **Order regarding Regulation of Security Guarding in Communities (Judea and Samaria) (No. 432), 1971**, Sec.1/3.

including violations of the right to freedom of movement, the right to dignity, and the right to property.

Despite the state's undertaking before the High Court of Justice (HCJ), which the court validated as a judgment, maps of CSC "guarding zones" in the West Bank are not published in a manner accessible to the public, particularly the Palestinian public.<sup>25</sup> The lack of publication of CSC "guarding zones" means that Palestinian landowners and residents do not know whether a CSC who uses force against them or detains them is exercising authority lawfully, or acting independently and without powers, and thus committing an offense.

For example, during the 2025 olive harvest, the military issued orders barring all persons, Palestinian and Israeli, from entering the lands of Palestinian villages lying south of Route 60 in the valley below the hilltop settlement of Yitzhar. On November 1, 2025, the District Coordination Office (DCO) informed Palestinian village councils in the Nablus area that the olive harvest in this area, from Huwara to Madama, was permitted with coordination with the military under the "coordination mechanism."<sup>26</sup> Many Palestinian farmers sought to take advantage of this coordination day and went out to harvest olives on their privately owned land. However, two security guards from the settlement of Yitzhar and a settler in uniform, all armed, arrived and expelled, using threats, anyone who tried to harvest south of the road. They also scattered harvested olives on the ground and damaged them.<sup>27</sup>

---

25 In 2016, the head of the Khader Village Council and Yesh Din petitioned the HCJ, demanding that the military release to the public any decision to change CSC guarding zones in the West Bank and that the Court order the removal of privately owned Palestinian land from CSC guarding zones. After a court hearing, the petitioners withdrew their petition following a state undertaking to publish new guarding zones online within two weeks of their signing (HCJ 10130/16, [Head of Khader Village Council et al. v. Commander of the Army Forces in the West Bank](#) [judgment dated June 3, 2019]). The orders are currently published on the army's website in Hebrew only, and are difficult to find; see: Legal Advisor for the West Bank, "[Proclamations, Orders and Appointments](#)," No. 250, May 2019 (Hebrew).

26 The "coordination mechanism" is used by the military to deny Palestinian farmers access to their privately owned land near Israeli settlements and outposts, allowing it only twice a year – in spring for plowing and in fall for the olive harvest. The mechanism is ostensibly meant to coordinate days on which soldiers escort Palestinians while they engage in farming to protect them from settler attacks.

27 Video documentation of the incident is available on the [Yesh Din website](#).

## “I decide. There is no coordination. Go home”



Two security guards from the settlement of Yitzhar and a settler in uniform, Burin, November 1, 2025 (photo courtesy of a Burin resident)

B. is a resident of Burin who owns a plot of olive trees south of Route 60. He heard from the local council that coordination had been arranged to harvest olives and went to his land on the morning of November 1, 2025, with his son and a laborer. B. told Yesh Din: “After about half an hour, an army jeep and a security ATV from Yitzhar arrived in the area, and another white pickup truck with a settler in army uniform, with sidelocks and a beard. The settlers started driving the farmers out of the area, and the army that passed by us did not speak to us. The security guard from the Yitzhar settlement, whom we know as ‘Yaakov’,<sup>28</sup> came up to us and started screaming: ‘Get out of here, leave everything and clear out.’ I told him in Arabic that there was coordination, and he shouted back: ‘I decide. There is no coordination. Go home.’ When he saw us picking up the tarps, ‘Yaakov’ poured out the olives that were on them and also emptied a bag of olives. We gathered up the tarps and left because we were afraid. We went home. We haven’t been back since that day. I don’t want to file a complaint with the Israeli police, because the army saw what they were doing to us and did nothing. I used to get 400 kilograms of oil from the plot every year. Now it’s zero, and this hurts my family’s livelihood.”<sup>29</sup>

28 The identity of the person who presents himself as “Yaakov” is known to Yesh Din, and many complaints have been received regarding his conduct.

29 B. to Yesh Din, November 2025.



The Palestinian DCO and the head of the Burin village council received no notice that coordination had been canceled for that day, meaning that, as far as Yesh Din is aware, the cancellation of the coordinated harvest on that day was the initiative of the Yitzhar settlement security personnel, in defiance of explicit military directives. Moreover, the area where the Palestinian harvesters were expelled was outside the Yitzhar CSC and emergency response team “guarding zone,” as defined in a military order. They have no authority in this area and are not permitted to operate there.<sup>30</sup>



The guarding and power zone around the settlement of Yitzhar is marked in red; the expulsion of the harvesters took place in the area marked with a blue arrow.

Similar incidents have been documented in this area in previous years. Not only did these incidents take place outside the guarding zone assigned to the CSC and emergency response team, but they also involved suspected criminal acts, violence, threats and damage to property. For example, during the 2024 harvest:

<sup>30</sup> Map taken from the military's website, see supra note 25. It should be noted that while this map is from 2009, a response from the Civil Administration to a letter from Yesh Din clarified this was the current guarding zone map (Public Liaison Officer and Freedom of Information Officer at the Civil Administration to Yesh Din, November 10, 2025).

## “He said it was a closed military zone”

On Friday, November 15, 2024, T., 58, went out with his family to harvest olives on their land in the village of Burin, south of Route 60. At about 12:30 P.M., a pickup truck drove into the plot and stopped next to the tree they were harvesting. T. told Yesh Din: “Four settlers in army uniforms got out. They wore kippahs and had beards and sidelocks. They had a Yitzhar settlement security guard with them. As soon as they got out of the pickup, they put on helmets and bulletproof vests.”

“I asked them if they were soldiers,” T. continued, “and one answered me: ‘No, I’m Yaakov.’ He spoke to me in Hebrew, threatening me with a gun and ordering me to sit on the ground with my hands behind my back. He said it was a closed military zone, so I asked if he had an order proving that. I know and understand the law. Immediately, he kicked me in the leg and in the back. I got up and sat on a bucket because of the pain. He kicked the bucket, and I fell on the ground. He also kicked me in my right leg, in the knee, and said: ‘Get out of here.’”

“Yaakov” ordered T. and his family to leave all their belongings in the field and told T. he was not allowed to speak with the Burin council or the Palestinian DCO, “otherwise I’ll kill you.”

“We left behind two sacks of olives we harvested in the morning, each about 40 kg of olives,” T. said. “Yaakov tore the sacks with a knife and spilled the olives on the ground among the thorns. We haven’t gone out to harvest olives ever since.”<sup>31</sup>



Settlers in uniform expelling Palestinians from the olive harvest, Burin, November 15, 2024 (photo: Yesh Din)

31 T. to Yesh Din, November 2024.

## Emergency Response Teams

In routine times, members of the emergency response teams are civilians who have volunteered to help guard the settlement where they live. They are not permitted to wear military uniforms. With the outbreak of the war in October 2023, most members of emergency response teams were called up for active reserve duty. They received financial compensation for their service and were permitted to wear military uniforms. In June 2024, the military began scaling back the number of emergency response team members on active military duty.<sup>32</sup>

The military order governing the operation of the emergency response teams is classified, and no information can be obtained about their recruitment process, training or the powers granted to their members. The military also denies public access to data on emergency response team staffing complements and the weapons, ammunition, and equipment used by their members.<sup>33</sup> Notably, some settlers are both members of the emergency response team in their settlement and serve in a regional defense unit.

### **“The settlers spread out all over the neighborhood. The army arrived an hour later”**

On August 15, 2024, about one hundred masked settlers entered the village of Jit. They fired shots, set homes and cars on fire, threw stones and hurled Molotov cocktails. Rashid Sadah, a 22-year-old village resident, was killed by gunfire during the incident.

M., 21, from Jit, told Yesh Din: “There were a lot of settlers. It’s hard for me to say how many. They were all masked. I saw one settler armed with a long rifle walking among the trees near my aunt’s house. I didn’t see any soldiers. When it got dark, I heard two shots. One of them hit me in the chest, and I fell. I was hospitalized in intensive care and released a week later. Luckily, the bullet entered through my chest and exited through my back.” A., a 55-year-old village resident, said: “We fled and locked ourselves in the house. We saw our cars go up in flames and settlers throwing stones at our house and at neighboring houses. At the same time, I heard gunfire. The incident went on. The settlers spread out all over the neighborhood. The army arrived an hour later.”<sup>34</sup>

32 IDF website, “Members of Emergency Response Teams in active Reserve Service to be Reduced,” June 24, 2024 (Hebrew).

33 Knesset Research and Information Center, “Information on Emergency Response Teams,” May 6, 2024 (Hebrew).

34 M. and A. to Yesh Din, August 2024.



The burnt cars belonging to A.'s family, Jit, August 2024 (photo: Yesh Din)

GOC Central Command Avi Bluth described the raid as “a very serious terrorist incident by Israelis who set out to deliberately harm residents of the village of Jit.” Unusually, the military conducted an inquiry following the settler rampage, which revealed several members of the emergency response team from the outpost of Havat Gilad, “who were not in active reserve duty, arrived at the scene without authorization, dressed in uniform, and acted contrary to the authority defined for the members of the [emergency] response team.”<sup>35</sup>

The inadequate oversight of emergency response teams is also evident from reports about independent acquisition of weapons. The Samaria Regional Council, for example, distributed dozens of sniper rifles to emergency response team members in the Council's territory, purchased at a cost of nearly one million ILS (roughly 315,500 USD). It is unknown whether the military played any part in training the settlers who were equipped with these lethal firearms or in regulating their use. Yossi Dagan, the head of the Council, did not conceal the main purpose of procuring the weapons, settlement expansion: “We have one mission – to win with the firearms, together with the IDF, with the security establishment and the emergency response teams. And we have another mission, to build up our land even more, because that is the great victory.”<sup>36</sup> The council also purchased vests, helmets, night-vision equipment, and drones for the settlers.<sup>37</sup>

35 IDF website, “Summary of the Investigation Into the Riots in the Town of Jit in Samaria,” August 28, 2024.

36 Israel National News, Arutz 7, “For the First Time in Israel: Emergency Response Teams in Samaria Receive Sniper Rifles,” May 11, 2025 (Hebrew).

37 Israel National News, Arutz 7, “Samaria Regional Council Distributes Thermal Drones to all Communities: ‘A Central Lesson from October 7,’” November 11, 2025 (Hebrew).



On November 4, 2025, Palestinians from the village of Qarawat Bani Hassan and Israeli activists went to harvest olives on village land, where no coordination with the military is required. During the harvest, a drone belonging to the settlement of Revava emergency response team hovered overhead in a threatening and dangerous manner. At one point, the drone struck the arm of an Israeli activist, injuring her.



The emergency response team drone threatening and injuring harvesters, Qarawat Bani Hassan, November 4, 2025 (photo: Eyal Warshavsky)

Two settlers from the settlement’s emergency response team arrived at the site to retrieve the drone. Both carried rifles: one wore a military uniform with civilian shoes, and the other wore army pants and a civilian shirt. When asked to identify themselves, they answered, “IDF.” The two settlers, who are emergency response team members, pointed their guns at the harvesters, and one of them cocked his gun and fired into the air above the harvesters’ heads (see cover photo).

The military initially claimed that the harvesters had downed the drone with stones, but later retracted this claim because the incident had been documented. About a week after the incident, the military announced that a member of the Revava settlement’s emergency response team had been dismissed from reserve service.<sup>38</sup>

38 Matan Golan, “Israeli Settlers Use Drone to Attack Palestinian Harvesters, Jewish Activists in West Bank,” **Haaretz English edition**, November 4, 2025; Nurit Yohanan, “Reservist who fired in the air near West Bank olive harvesters dismissed from duty,” **Times of Israel**, November 11, 2025.

## “If you come here again, I’ll kill you”

F. is a shepherd who lives in Khirbet Shuweika in South Mount Hebron. On February 1, 2024, he went out with his son to graze in the area near their home. “After about an hour, a drone appeared above us,” F. told Yesh Din, “These drones really scare the sheep, and the flock scatters in panic over the area.” A few minutes later, six armed settlers wearing army uniforms arrived. F. recognized one of them as a settler who lives in a nearby shepherding outpost. He had come across him in previous incidents. “They grabbed us and tied our hands behind our backs, beat us with rifle butts and snatched our phones from us. They tightened the zip-ties to the point where they cut through the flesh, and there was blood.” “I told them I was grazing my flock in a plot that belongs to me,” F. added, “and the settler, whom I know very well, answered: ‘If you come here again, I’ll kill you.’”

The settlers in uniform left the place, leaving F. and his son injured and bound.<sup>39</sup>

## Inherent Conflict of Interest

Civilian security coordinators in the West Bank and the emergency response teams that assist them are civilians who are equipped with military firearms and authorized to carry out policing operations in the areas assigned to them, including use of force. At the operational and professional level, CSCs are subordinate to the Military Commander in the West Bank. However, funding for the CSC function is provided by the Ministry of Defense, and they are employed directly by the local and regional settlement authorities in the West Bank, in which they usually also reside.

The multiplicity of bodies under which the CSCs and the emergency response teams operate produces an inherent conflict of interest. As agents of the military, they are obligated by the laws of occupation to protect Palestinians and their property, including from harm by others, and to refrain from harming them. However, like soldiers in the regional defense battalions, CSCs and members of the emergency response teams are settlers, that is, members of a group that seeks to further entrench and expand Jewish presence in the West Bank by taking over Palestinian land. Thus, the territorial interests of the settlements clash with the role of emergency response teams and CSCs as representatives of the law.

This conflict of interest is reflected, for example, in the wide latitude CSCs have in defining what constitutes a security threat. Within their guarding zone, the law allows CSCs, that is, armed settlers, to enter Palestinians’ private property without consent, conduct physical searches on Palestinians and even detain them using force. This highly

<sup>39</sup> F. to Yesh Din, February 2024.

consequential power intimidates Palestinians and threatens their freedom to access private land near which settlements or outposts have been built.

Granting law enforcement powers, including the use of force, against Palestinians to armed civilians belonging to the settler interest group upends the concept of the rule of law in the West Bank and goes far beyond what international law considers reasonable for law enforcement authorities in occupied territory.

Given the lack of substantive oversight of CSCs, they and the emergency teams often exceed the powers granted to them within their guarding zones or operate outside them, over expansive areas. These excesses, which are often accompanied by criminal acts, are left unaddressed by the Israeli authorities, adding to the climate of intimidation and the harm caused to Palestinian residents.

### **“I told him this was Area B, and he had no authority to detain me”**

S., a 57-year-old resident of Madama, went out on February 12, 2024, with his digger to clear a dirt path between houses in the village. Around noon, the Yitzhar settlement security vehicle arrived, and a settlement security guard, whom S. knew from previous incidents, got out, along with three settlers in uniform. S. said: “I could tell they were settlers because they weren’t wearing helmets, only kippahs, and they had sidelocks. They were armed.” The security guard approached S. and told him to stop working, using threats: “He said this was my last warning and that next time he would confiscate the digger and detain me. I told him this was Area B, and he had no authority to detain me.”

When S. tried to turn the digger around and go back, the settlers in uniform “surrounded me and yelled at me. Suddenly, I heard gunshots. The shots came from one of the men in uniform, a big guy, wearing a kippah, with a black beard and long sidelocks. The security guard threw stones at me.” S. was not physically hurt in the incident, but the digger’s windows were shattered.

Yesh Din helped S. file a complaint over the assault by the security guard and the emergency response team. The MAG Corps chose not to launch a criminal investigation, stating that “a suspected offense that was not committed in the course of or in connection with military service or a military task will be handled by civilian law enforcement authorities, even if the suspect was wearing a uniform at the time of the alleged offense.”<sup>40</sup>

40 S. to Yesh Din, February 2024; MAG Corps to Yesh Din, August 6, 2024.

Soldiers often help CSCs and back them up, which serves as a force multiplier for their violent actions. Although CSCs are required to follow the military's directives, in many instances the opposite occurs: soldiers who arrive at scenes in which CSCs harm Palestinians see themselves as subservient to the older and more experienced CSCs and follow their instructions. And so, the soldiers, too, fail to uphold the military's obligations under international law to protect the Palestinian population.

### **“The CSC pointed his gun at us, cocked it and said in Arabic that we were not going anywhere”**

On July 21, 2025, M. and his brother saw a settler enter a private family plot of olive trees in their village in south Hebron hills with his flock. They called the police and went to the area with their father. After about 15 minutes, a police officer arrived, checked, and confirmed that this was their private land. Meanwhile, the CSC of the nearby settlement arrived at the scene. The family knew the man from a previous violent incident that ended with the father's leg being amputated as a result of a gunshot wound. After they filed a complaint against the settler who was grazing his flock on their land, the police officer told M. and his family that they were free to leave. “But then,” M. recounted, “we saw the CSC talking with the officer, and the officer told us not to leave and to wait for the military to arrive. The CSC pointed his gun at us, cocked it and said in Arabic that we were not going anywhere.” The police officer left a few minutes later, and “it was just us and the CSC.”

A vehicle that looked like the settlement security vehicle then arrived, and five armed men in uniform got out. They ordered M. and his brother to kneel; one of them kicked M. in the legs, and the CSC struck his brother in the back with a rifle butt.

M. said: “Then an army jeep arrived with three or four soldiers. They had insignia and helmets. One of the soldiers blindfolded my brother and tied his hands behind his back. They took my brother and me toward the jeep, and kept hitting me in the legs behind the knees. Then the CSC came, turned my face toward the side of the jeep and took a picture of me. They tied my hands behind my back.”

This was the beginning of an ordeal of abuse by the soldiers that lasted all night. M. and his brother were driven to a military camp in Susiya. Throughout the entire ride, “they didn't stop swearing at us, hitting and elbowing us.” From there, they were taken to another base near the settlement of Kiryat Arba and then back to Susiya. “They beat us again and again,” M. recalled. In Susiya, soldiers locked

them in a caravan, and “about every 15 minutes, soldiers came in to beat me. That went on until eight o’clock in the morning. They beat me all over my body.”



**M.’s brother on his knees, surrounded by armed settlers in uniform and the CSC (photo courtesy of the family)**

After an entire night of abuse, M. was taken to the police station in the settlement of Kiryat Arba. After a few minutes of talking with an interrogator, the police released M. unconditionally, and he went to a hospital to receive treatment for the injuries inflicted on him by the men in uniform.<sup>41</sup> M. filed a complaint over the abuse he suffered at the hands of the CSC, the emergency response team and the soldiers. As of December 2025, the complaint, which was filed with both the police and the MAG Corps, is still under review.

41 M. to Yesh Din, July 2025.

## Settlers in Uniform

Recruiting thousands of settlers and providing them with firearms and uniforms has, as noted, produced numerous violent incidents against Palestinians, perpetrated by soldiers from regional defense battalions and members of emergency response teams. These individuals exploited the power they received from the state, exceeding their authority or operating outside their assigned area. Additionally, the appearance of settlers in uniform in the West Bank has greatly proliferated and now also includes incidents in which Israeli civilians who do not hold any official position use military-issued firearms and uniforms without authority and in breach of the law. Since the beginning of the war, countless incidents of violence against Palestinians involving settlers in full or partial military uniforms have been recorded.

Under Israeli law, both civilian and military, unauthorized individuals are not permitted to wear full or partial military or police uniforms.<sup>42</sup> When settlers wear military uniforms, they deliberately blur the distinction between civilians and soldiers, an act that is part of a criminal pattern. The military clothing, which identifies the settlers as part of the security forces, serves two main purposes: in relation to the military, the uniform signals that the settler is Israeli and protects them from harm by soldiers. In relation to the Palestinians, the uniform creates the appearance that the settler is authorized to enforce the rule of law and that their orders must be obeyed.

Settlers who wear military uniforms on their own initiative rather than as part of an official military role are not charged with responsibility for law enforcement or public order, and the only interest guiding them is the territorial interest of the settlements. What has taken shape in the West Bank is the emergence of organized armed groups, civilian militias that pose as soldiers by wearing uniforms identical or similar to those of the Israeli military in order to secure protection, legitimacy and authority.

It is difficult to estimate how many incidents of violence by settlers in uniform have actually occurred since the deliberate confusion between settlers and soldiers makes it difficult to identify the assailants with certainty. However, the examples presented below do suggest a pattern of military uniforms providing cover for criminal activity by Israeli civilians against Palestinians in the West Bank.

---

<sup>42</sup> See supra note 5.

## “He changed into an army uniform, even though he was not on reserve duty at the time, and took a gun with him”

On October 29, 2024, N.’s family from the village of Immatin went to harvest olives in the family’s private plot. The harvest was only possible after the army coordinated work on the land for that day. Three settlers from the outpost of Havat Gilad noticed the Palestinian family harvesting and decided to drive them off their land.

An indictment filed by the Central District Attorney’s Office over the incident stated that one of the settlers went home, “changed into an army uniform, even though he was not on reserve duty at the time, and took a gun with him.” The settler went to the Palestinian family’s land, in uniform, and fired 18 bullets, wounding two Palestinian olive harvesters. He did not stop until all the family members had fled their land.<sup>43</sup>

N. told Yesh Din: “Three men came out, one in uniform and two in civilian clothes, and they fired in the air. I walked toward the settlers and told them in Hebrew that we would leave. The ‘soldier’ fired in the air, and I turned around to go back to the family. Then, I felt I was wounded and fell. I heard a lot of shots. I couldn’t get up on my own. I touched my leg below the knee and felt a lot of blood. I screamed for help. I was hospitalized for six days and underwent two surgeries. Now, I’m bedridden at home.”<sup>44</sup>

## Armed carjacking

On the morning of September 10, 2024, S. was driving his car in the center of the village of Deir Dobwan. S. told Yesh Din: “A gray pickup truck stopped and blocked the road in front of me. There were five settlers in it, wearing kippahs and tzitzit. Several settlers got out of the pickup truck, one dressed in uniform and carrying a gun. The others had sticks. The armed settler in uniform came up to my car, pointed the gun at my head and told me to step out of the car. I was in shock and didn’t have time to take out the key. When I got out, he threatened me at gunpoint, got into the car and drove off to the east, and the pickup with the other settlers drove off after him.”<sup>45</sup>

43 CrimC 15026-02-25 **State of Israel v. Shmuel Zafran**; as of December 2025, the case is still pending before the District Court.

44 N. to Yesh Din, November 2024.

45 S. to Yesh Din, September 2024.



Image from footage of the incident caught on security cameras, Deir Dobwan, September 10, 2024 (photo courtesy of the village council)

[Click to watch the video of the armed carjacking carried out by a settler in uniform](#)

## The settlers changed into uniforms and fired in the air

On October 16, 2024, J. went with his family and volunteers to harvest olives on the family's land in a-Tuwani. He told Yesh Din that after about an hour, "four settlers arrived on two ATVs, dressed in civilian clothes. When they reached the land, they changed into uniforms and fired in the air to scare us. Then they came closer and shoved us. One of them hit me in the face with his hand, on my left eye. The other three pushed everyone who did not manage to run away. I told people to get away from the area so they would not get hurt."<sup>46</sup>

## Home invasion and threats

M., a married father of five, lives in Sha'b a-Butum. Toward the end of October 2023, settlers appeared at his doorstep on an ATV, "armed and wearing army pants and civilian shirts." They threatened M. and his family, caused extensive damage to items belonging to the family, damaged M.'s car and stole valuable agricultural equipment.

46 J. to Yesh Din, October 2024.

Several days later, on October 25, 2023, in the early afternoon, 15 armed men and women arrived in two cars, and M. understood they were settlers in army uniforms. “They were not wearing helmets and their clothing was a mix of army and civilian clothes,” he told Yesh Din.

The settlers grabbed M., his son and his cousin and beat them severely. “My ribs were broken, I lost consciousness, and they dragged me while I was passed out,” M. recounted. The settlers went on a rampage inside the house, smashing everything they laid their hands on, scattering food on the floor and breaking windows.

After a long rampage, one of the settler women took M.’s wife into the house, showed her the damage and threatened that if the family returned home, “they would burn the house down with everyone inside. We were warned that if we called the police, the result would be death.”<sup>47</sup>

### “If you don’t get out of here, I’ll shoot you”

Y. is a father of seven who lives in al-Khader. He owns a plot of land located between the settlements of Neve Daniel and Elazar, where he grows olive and other fruit trees. On November 21, 2024, Y. arrived at the plot and saw a digger working on it. Y. told Yesh Din: “Four settlers in army uniforms walked toward me. They were armed. I know them from previous incidents that took place on my plot. I saw that the digger had destroyed the structure that was on the plot.” The settlers demanded Y.’s ID, and he refused. They demanded that he get off his land, and one of them threatened him: “If you don’t get out of here, I’ll shoot you.”

Y. called the coordination officer at the Civil Administration and told him about the presence of the four armed men on his plot. The officer immediately replied: “They are not soldiers but settlers.” Y. also called the police while the settlers’ digger continued to destroy the plot. After some time, four soldiers arrived, and the settlers in uniform fled.<sup>48</sup>

47 M. to Yesh Din, April 2024.

48 Y. to Yesh Din, February 2024.

## “They pulled me out of the car, beat me and kicked me in the head and body”

A. from the village of Jit went to his plot of land on October 12, 2024. He told Yesh Din: “When I started loading equipment into the car, I noticed that the farmers working nearby began to run toward the neighborhood. Three settlers in army uniforms and sneakers and three settlers in civilian clothes, all armed, ran after them. [...] The three settlers in uniform reached me. They pulled me out of the car, beat me and kicked me in the head and body. Then they tied my hands and dragged me toward a half-built house. There was a real soldier standing on the way there who pulled me out of the settlers’ hands and stood next to me to protect me. The soldier said, ‘The assailants are not soldiers but settlers in uniform.’”<sup>49</sup>

## False arrest, violence and unauthorized interrogation

B., a 32-year-old shepherd from the village of Thulth, went with his brother on January 9, 2024, to graze the family’s flock. In the early afternoon, three armed men in uniform approached them, one of whom was wearing sneakers. The three took the brothers’ ID cards and phones, and the soldier-settler in the sneakers, “tied our hands and blindfolded us.” B. and his brother were led in the direction of the settlement of Ma’ale Shomron, while their flock wandered off and scattered.

“In the settlement, they put us into a vehicle,” B. recounted, “They drove us, handcuffed and blindfolded, I have no idea where. At some point, they took us out and beat us, a lot, mainly between the legs, in the testicles. One of them interrogated us, swearing and yelling. The beatings continued throughout the interrogation.”

After about five hours, “the ‘soldiers’ took us and dumped us somewhere among cypress trees. They removed our handcuffs and blindfolds and gave us back our ID cards and phones.”

The next day, B. went to look for the flock with his cousin. They identified their goats in an enclosure inside the settlement of Karnei Shomron. By the end of that day, through a settler the shepherds knew, they got back 172 of their 200 goats.<sup>50</sup>

49 A. to Yesh Din, December 2023.

50 B. to Yesh Din, January 2024.

## Impersonating a soldier in an attempt to conceal evidence

In the early hours of October 24, 2025, S., a businessman from the village of Deir Dobwan heard an explosion under his house. He looked out the window and saw four masked men and three cars on fire. After the arsonists fled, S. noticed Hebrew hate graffiti spray-painted on the house wall: “Revenge” and a Star of David. S. immediately reported the arson to the authorities.

“At 6:30 A.M. a soldier arrived,” S. told Yesh Din, “He came on foot from the direction of the outposts. The soldier was in uniform and armed, but he came alone. He demanded the footage from the security cameras around the house. I was suspicious of him because he was alone and did not give him the footage. He left and walked back in the direction of the outposts.”

At 10:00 A.M., the Israeli police arrived together with an army force. They took S.’s testimony and asked for the security camera footage.<sup>51</sup>



Vehicle arson, Deir Dobwan, October 24, 2025 (photo courtesy of the family)

51 S. to Yesh Din, November 2025.

## “We all went back feeling lucky we didn’t get killed”

W., a resident of the village of Aqraba, went with his family to harvest olives on the family’s land on November 22, 2023. After several hours, soldiers informed them that the area was a closed military zone. The family’s five children got into the car and started driving back home, while W. and his wife walked. On the way, a vehicle with Israeli license plates appeared in front of them, carrying three masked men in army uniforms.

W. told Yesh Din: “They prevented our car from continuing home. At gunpoint, they forced the children out of the car and beat them with clubs. My wife and I also saw how they smashed their phones. They tore open 23 sacks of olives that were in the car, spilled the olives onto the road and crushed them by driving over them, and ordered the children to walk home. We all went back feeling lucky we didn’t get killed. Since then, we have not gone back to the land and have not harvested even a single olive.”<sup>52</sup>

---

52 W. to Yesh Din, November 2023.

# A Policy of Non-Enforcement

Israeli state support for settlers in uniform goes beyond providing arms and military cooperation. It is also expressed through the policies adopted by law enforcement authorities toward them.

Data collected by Yesh Din over more than two decades show that the vast majority of complaints filed by Palestinians against Israelis who harmed them, civilians and soldiers alike, are closed without indictments being filed.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, many Palestinian victims of offenses forgo their right to file complaints against Israelis in the first place. The reasons are varied, and include fear that complaining would lead to retaliation and further harm, mistrust in Israeli law enforcement authorities, which are part of the occupation apparatus, and the ordeal the Israeli system puts Palestinian victims of offenses through before they are even able to make a complaint.<sup>54</sup>

In cases involving complaints against individuals in uniform, Israeli law enforcement authorities appear especially determined to shirk their responsibility to investigate the incidents. A Palestinian harmed by an Israeli in military uniform cannot tell if the attacker is a regular soldier, a settler from a regional defense unit or a member of a settlement emergency response team. They certainly cannot tell the difference between a soldier on duty and a civilian impersonating a soldier. For this reason, Palestinians who choose to file complaints against uniformed assailants contact the MAG Corps and demand an MPCID investigation. However, in Yesh Din's experience, attempts by law enforcement to shirk their responsibility in such cases are so prevalent that they appear to be a deliberate policy.

## “No military activity was carried out at the site”

M. is a resident of Madama. On the morning of November 11, 2023, he went out with his family to harvest olives in the family's private plot, next to village homes. At around 10:00 A.M., a white pickup truck arrived and three armed men in army uniforms got out.

53 Yesh Din, [Data Sheet: Law Enforcement on Israeli Civilians in the West Bank \(Settler violence\) 2005-2025](#) (December 2025); Yesh Din, [Data Sheet: Duration of Processing of Complaints Concerning Israeli Soldiers' Offenses against Palestinians in the West Bank – 2016–2025 data](#) (December 2025).

54 Israeli police stations in the West Bank are located inside settlements, meaning Palestinians are denied free access to them. Victims of offenses who do manage to access a police station are often kept waiting for long periods of time to file their complaint because there is no way to schedule appointments in advance, and Arabic-speaking investigators are scarce.

M. asked his family members to leave the area, and he and his brother gathered the harvesting equipment and moved away into the yard of the house closest to the plot. M. told Yesh Din: “The three soldiers chased us and reached the yard. Without saying anything, they took our phones and ID cards and returned them shortly afterward. One of the three aimed his gun at us, and the other two took the olive shaker and the battery and went back up toward the pickup truck.” The stolen equipment was worth about 2,600 ILS (roughly 820 USD).<sup>55</sup>



**The uniformed men threatening at gunpoint and stealing the harvesting equipment, Madama, November 11, 2023 (photo courtesy of the family)**

In December 2023, Yesh Din filed a complaint with the military advocate for operational matters at the MAG Corps on behalf of M.’s family, demanding an investigation against the three uniformed individuals on suspicion of theft and abuse of authority under the Military Justice Law. Four months later, the MAG Corps replied that after an examination, “it appears that no military activity was carried out at the site,” and, therefore, the complaint should be “referred to the Israel Police.”<sup>56</sup>

Two days later, Yesh Din replied to the MAG Corps, attaching video footage of the incident that clearly shows soldiers in uniform threatening M. and his family at gunpoint and stealing the electric olive shaker. Yesh Din added that, “the fact that your files contain no record of military activity in this area does not mean that no offense was committed by soldiers. Moreover, the fact that your files contain no record of military activity at the time and place indicated may, in fact, suggest that the soldiers acted without authority, adding offenses beyond theft.” Yesh Din demanded an MPCID investigation against the soldiers seen in the footage of the incident.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> M. to Yesh Din, November 2023.

<sup>56</sup> Legal Service for Operational Matters to Yesh Din, March 17, 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Yesh Din to Legal Service for Operational Matters, March 19, 2024.

In response, the military advocate for operational matters argued that decisions regarding investigation and legal action on complaints are made “on a case by case basis, according to the particular circumstances and in light of many different considerations, including the question of the context of the alleged conduct, whether it is of a military or civilian nature.”<sup>58</sup> While not disputing that the assailants wore military uniforms, the MAG Corps again referred the victim to file a complaint with the Israel Police.

4. ההחלטה לגבי הגורם המטפל (בשלב החקירה וההחלטה במישור המשפטי), מתקבלת בכל מקרה לפי נסיבותיו, ובראי שיקולים רבים ושוונים, ובהם שאלת הזיקה של החשדות - האם בעלת אופי צבאי או אזרחי. בהתאם, ייתכן כי חשד לעבירה שלא נעשתה אגב או בזיקה לשירות הצבאי או למשימה הצבאית, יטופל על ידי גורמי האכיפה האזרחיים, גם אם החשוד לבש מדים בעת העבירה הלכאורית.

4. The decision regarding agency jurisdiction (at the investigation phase and decisions on legal action) is made on a case by case basis, according to the particular circumstances and in light of many different considerations, including the question of the context of the alleged conduct, whether it is of a military or civilian nature. Accordingly, it is possible that an alleged offence not committed in connection with military service or a military mission will be handled by civilian enforcement agencies, even if the suspect wore a uniform at the time of the alleged offense.

**Excerpt from the letter of the military advocate for operational matters to Yesh Din, March 17, 2024, and translation.**

In September 2024, after the MAG Corps gave a standard, uniform response in several cases of violent incidents against Palestinians involving individuals in uniform, Yesh Din wrote to the Attorney General and the military advocate general, urgently requesting an official directive clarifying which agency has the power and obligation to investigate offenses committed by soldiers who are West Bank residents against Palestinians.

The letter contained examples of incidents in which Israeli civilians in uniform harmed innocent Palestinians without cause or authority, which were not investigated by any official body, even though the victims had filed complaints. Yesh Din further argued that the response given by the Legal Service for Operational Matters created ambiguity and confusion about which agency victims should contact regarding offenses committed by uniformed individuals, since an ordinary person has no way of knowing whether an offense is of a “military or civilian nature,” or whether the uniformed perpetrators fall under the investigative jurisdiction of the military or the police.

The letter stated that a policy of no investigation and no prosecution in cases of criminal offenses against the protected Palestinian population, as reflected in the standard response provided by the military advocate for operational matters, constitutes a breach of international law.

<sup>58</sup> Military Advocate for Operational Matters to Yesh Din, April 17, 2024.

Finally, Yesh Din argued that when the Legal Service for Operational Matters refers victims to file their complaints with the police, the result is, at best, delays in processing and, at worst, failure to conduct an exhaustive investigation. Experience shows that when a complaint is filed with the police regarding an incident involving a person in uniform, the police either claim they lack jurisdiction to investigate or close the case.

In other words, this policy leads to failed investigations, the loss of crucial evidence caused by substantial delays in opening investigations and a real risk that no investigation will be opened at all. This policy of non-enforcement leaves Palestinian victims powerless in the face of the violence directed at them and is perceived by Israeli offenders as tacit permission to further escalate their criminal acts against Palestinians while wearing army uniforms.<sup>59</sup>

The response of the Legal Service for Operational Matters, received in December 2024, largely repeated the same arguments and failed to provide effective redress for the victims. As of December 2025, no response has been received from the attorney general.

### **“The investigation was transferred to another agency”**

In the early morning of October 25, 2023, F. went with his 12-year-old son to graze their flock. F. recounted that a few minutes later, “I noticed that a settler we know very well, accompanied by two other settlers, an armed ‘soldier’ and five dogs, also went out to graze with a flock of about 20–30 sheep. The settler was armed and wore an army uniform and regular shoes.”

F. approached the group of Israelis, explained to them that they had intruded onto his land and asked them to leave. In response, “the settler swore at me and threatened that we deserved to be slaughtered given what Hamas did in southern Israel.”

F. called his brother and asked him to call the police. Not long afterward, a jeep with four soldiers arrived. After checking with the Civil Administration, the soldiers learned that this was a fenced private plot belonging to F.’s family, and they demanded that the settler and his people leave the area.

The settler returned with the flock at 4:00 P.M., this time with another settler and a “soldier.” They tried to break through the fence by force and enter the private plot. Soldiers and Civil Administration personnel once again arrived at the scene. F. recounted: “At this point, the soldiers were about 200 meters from the plot

59 Yesh Din to the Attorney General and the Chief Military Advocate General, September 10, 2024.

and shouted at the settler to leave. The soldiers walked toward us, and then the settler pulled out a taser and tasered me. I lost control, began convulsing and fell to the ground. When I fell, the settler kicked me and hit me with his rifle butt. I passed out. When I came to, the settler went on swearing at everyone. The soldiers stood there and did not lift a finger. The settler repeated his threats that he would ‘slaughter me and kill this son of a bitch. You have no land. Everything is ours. Go to Jordan, you son of a bitch, and there they’ll fuck you up.’”



The “shepherd” in uniform, October 25, 2023 (photo courtesy of F.)

Ultimately, soldiers and police officers removed the settlers, and F. was taken to hospital and kept overnight. Four days later, F. went to file a complaint at the Kiryat Arba police station. “The officer was racist towards me, did not let me speak, and spoke to me rudely. I felt like they were not taking my statement but interrogating me as if I were the suspect. He threatened me not to come back again to file complaints and wondered whether maybe I had just fallen and no one really touched me.”<sup>60</sup>

About two weeks later, the police closed the investigation file, citing “transferred to another agency,” without specifying which one. Yesh Din contested the closure

60 F. to Yesh Din, November 2023.

on F.'s behalf, and in September 2024, the Hebron Police responded, stating: "The investigation file was examined in depth. In light of the fact that the suspect was on active reserve duty, the file was closed on the grounds of 'transferred to another agency' and transferred for further processing by the MPCID. In view of the above, you may contact the MPCID for an update on the suspect's investigation and the progress of the investigation file."<sup>61</sup>

Yesh Din contacted the MAG Corps on F.'s behalf, and was told, in January 2025, "The matter about which you are inquiring has recently been transferred to the Israel Police station in Hebron, and received there. We clarify that the case was received by the MPCID in October 2023, and it was found that, on the face of it, given the nature of the incident described in the complaint, it should be transferred to the Israel Police. However, due to an error, transfer to the Israel Police was delayed."<sup>62</sup>

As of December 2025, more than two years after the assault on F., the case remains under investigation by Hebron Police.

While the MAG Corps refuses to review and investigate complaints about harm caused to Palestinians by settlers in uniform, in the years 2023–2025, Yesh Din filed 16 complaints with the police concerning such incidents. Five complaints are still under investigation, ten have been closed (eight of them on the grounds of "offender unknown"), and one investigation was transferred to the MPCID, where it is still pending. No indictments have been filed.

The failure of agencies charged with law enforcement in the West Bank to provide a substantive response signals to offending settlers that the Israeli authorities encourage them to carry on and leaves Palestinian residents abandoned to their fate and exposed to abuse and harm by Israelis in uniform, both soldiers and civilians.

---

61 Hebron Police to Yesh Din, September 17, 2024.

62 Legal Service for Operational Matters, MAG Corps to Yesh Din, January 22, 2025.

## Conclusion

Israel has equipped thousands of settlers with military firearms and uniforms and given them lethal powers without adequate oversight mechanisms. Shootings, violent assaults, trespassing, theft and property damage are only some examples of the types of offenses Israeli civilians have committed against Palestinians behind the shield of military-issued firearms and uniforms over the past two years. The perpetrators were settler-soldiers on military duty who were abusing their authority, settler-soldiers on leave acting outside any official mission, or settlers in uniform acting on their own initiative.

Regional defense units, civilian security coordinators and emergency response teams are part of the civilian-military security apparatus of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. This report does not analyze this security doctrine or examine its merit. However, Settlers in Uniform does demonstrate that the policies practiced by Israel have effectively created armed militias in the West Bank and resulted in countless instances in which settlers abused the power and authority granted to them by the state to initiate ideologically motivated attacks on Palestinians and promote settlement interests.

Under international law, the military commander is responsible for ensuring the safety of Palestinians in the West Bank and for enabling them to live their lives normally. Israel has delegated some military powers and resources to civilians with a nationalist-messianic ideology who seek to expel Palestinians and expand Jewish settlement in the West Bank. This practice has intentionally blurred the distinction between civilians and military forces, leading to systematic harm to Palestinians by settlers in uniform.

Members of armed forces are expected to act in the name of the law and in accordance with the military commander's obligations. They wear uniforms in order to be identifiable as soldiers and provide visual confirmation that they hold authority. In contrast, when civilians wear uniforms without authorization or exceed their authority, they are, quite literally, taking the law into their own hands, creating the false appearance of belonging to the military and abusing the power that comes with the uniform. Moreover, the disregard shown by law enforcement agencies for criminal activity by settlers carried out under the cover of military uniforms enables the continued unlawful use of force by Israeli civilians and drains the rule of law of meaning.

Although many of the settlers who were mobilized at the beginning of the war into emergency response teams and regional defense battalions are no longer on active reserve duty, the military has allowed them to retain the firearms and uniforms, advancing two outcomes Israel seeks. In addition to the original goal of regional defense, whereby these settlers serve as auxiliary forces assisting security personnel in protecting Israeli civilians living in West Bank settlements, the settlers' criminal use of military-issued firearms and uniforms to harm Palestinians and drive them off their land contributes

to Israel's broader objective of seizing more land in the West Bank and annexing the territory without its Palestinian residents.

**Israeli policies have effectively turned settlers in uniform into subcontractors for the military in the West Bank without even minimal oversight. In practice, Israel is arming civilian forces that engage in criminal activity in the West Bank and supports them by refraining from enforcing the law when they commit offenses. In so doing, Israel abandons the local Palestinian population to the violence of civilian militias, betraying its obligations under international law.**

### **Recommendations**

1. Israel must reconsider the policy whereby the military arms and delegates authority to civilians whose interests are diametrically opposed to the military commander's duty to maintain public order and safety for the Palestinian population of the West Bank.
2. To prevent further harm to Palestinians by settlers in uniform, the military and the police must closely supervise the distribution of firearms to civilians, provide training on their use, and ensure that those granted powers and given firearms do not abuse these powers or operate outside their assigned areas.
3. Israeli law enforcement authorities, headed by the attorney general and the MAG Corps, must determine which agency is competent to investigate and prosecute settlers in uniform who harm Palestinians, and instruct law enforcement bodies hold the offenders accountable