



Yesh Din

Volunteers for Human Rights

The olive harvest season, which traditionally begins upon the first drop of rain and officially on October 15, is a national and cultural symbol, as well as a vital, often exclusive source of income for many Palestinians in the West Bank. It is also a time of increased settler violence against Palestinians, with incidents including physical attacks on harvesters, cutting, uprooting and burning trees, and theft of crop and farming equipment. Soldiers are often present during these incidents, but rather than fulfilling their obligation to protect the Palestinians, they sometimes join forces with the assailants. In addition, many farmers face restrictions imposed by the military through the 'coordination mechanism', which was originally intended to ensure land owners access to their lands and to protect them from settler violence, but in practice often prevents them from fully harvesting their crop by limiting access to their lands to an inappropriately short period of time, often allowing only the land owner and not his family to access the lands, without the necessary equipment.

The harsh restrictions on freedom of movement throughout the West Bank are expected to be a major obstacle in farmers' access to their agricultural lands, and the settler violence, which has escalated since October 2023, is likely to deter Palestinians from harvesting their crops in fear of violence. The 2025 harvest season is particularly critical for Palestinian farmers, in light of last year's failed harvest, when

thousands were denied access to their lands for harvesting, either through movement restrictions imposed by the military, organized violence by Israeli civilians supported by Israeli security forces, or both.

**Urgent Letter to The Commander of The West Bank Ahead of
The Olive Harvest Season to Allow and Protect Palestinian
Olive Harvesting**

With the harvest season fast approaching, on August 12, 2025, Yesh Din sent an urgent letter to Major General Avi Baluth, Military Commander of the West Bank, Head of the Judea & Samaria District Police, and the Legal Advisor to the West Bank, demanding that Palestinian farmers in the West Bank be allowed and enabled to harvest the olives on their lands, and that their safety be ensured. In the letter, Yesh Din mentioned the increasing lack of responsiveness of law enforcement authorities (the civil administration, police, and military): “Every year, the olive harvest is marked by severe violence against Palestinians and extensive damage to Palestinian property. Since the outbreak of the war, we have witnessed a significant escalation in violence and property damage, both in the number of incidents and their severity. While violence has increased, channels of communication with law enforcement authorities, which Palestinians or Israeli organizations had been able to contact when violent incidents occurred, have been increasingly blocked, until none remain at all”.

During the 2024 harvest, which took place between October 1 and November 15, 2024, [Yesh Din documented 113 separate incidents of violence](#), harassment, denial of access to harvest, or damage to olive trees and crops, involving Israeli civilians and soldiers. These incidents occurred throughout the West Bank, on lands belonging to 51

Palestinian villages, towns, and communities. Olive harvests in previous years have also been steeped in incidents of harassment, violent assault, theft, and vandalism by settlers. These acts are backed and emboldened by the presence of soldiers, who, instead of maintaining order and enabling Palestinians to harvest safely as required by law, have in practice served as security details for violent settler gangs that espouse Jewish supremacy, racism and hatred of Palestinians and provided a safe space for acts of terrorism and ideologically motivated crimes against Palestinian farmers.

[Read the letter \(translated to English\)](#)

What Can the International Community Do?

Yesh Din urges representatives of the international community to contact COGAT and apply pressure to fulfill their duty according to international law. The following requests are the most relevant to this coming harvest season:

1. **Schedule the harvest for the earliest possible date.** In our experience, the closer the approved harvest days are to the end of the season, the greater the window of opportunity for theft, since Palestinians can't access the land without coordination, leaving the crop unguarded and vulnerable to theft.
2. Provide Palestinian farmers with **guaranteed, constant security on their plots during harvest hours**, enabling them to harvest safely and without fear on the few days they are granted access to their land.

3. **Increase the number of days on which access to farmland is permitted** to match the amount of olives to be harvested and the size of the plot, given that every year, farmers' testimonies reveal they are unable to harvest all the olives on their land due to insufficient coordinated harvest days.
4. **Circulate, ahead of time, a contact sheet with updated phone numbers for all relevant law enforcement officials - military, civil administration and police** - who may be contacted in real time in the event of an incident requiring immediate intervention by security forces. We make this request every year, but have never received any such list.
5. **Issue clarification to all forces on the ground that they are authorized by law to detain Israeli civilians suspected of committing offenses until the police arrive, and that it is their duty to stop Israeli civilians who harm Palestinians.** Soldiers should also be informed of their duty not to actively or unlawfully infringe upon Palestinians' rights, for example, by halting the harvest or removing Palestinians instead of confronting Israeli offenders.
6. **Increase police presence on the ground** to enable faster responses that demonstrate the seriousness demanded by these criminal offenses, which, as stated, are on an alarming upward trend during the harvest season.
7. **Clearly define the powers of settlement security forces.** Clearly and categorically determine which agency is responsible for investigating offenses committed by settlers in military uniforms - the Israel Police or the Military.

8. **Remove any existing roadblocks** on roads leading to farmlands to give farmers access to their farmlands during the harvest.

Invitation to a Joint Webinar in Preparation for the Olive Harvest

Yesh Din invites the diplomatic community to our upcoming joint webinar, co-hosted by the Platform – Israeli NGOs for Human Rights and HaMoked – Center for the Defence of the Individual. The webinar, titled "Denied Access to Agricultural Land in the West Bank: The Olive Harvest as a Yearly Peak of Harm," will take place **tomorrow (Thursday, September 11, 2025), at 16:00 IDT (UTC+3)**.

This webinar will examine the growing restrictions Palestinian farmers have faced in accessing their lands in the West Bank since October 2023. The barriers, including the closure of gates in the Separation Barrier, and a sharp rise in settler violence, are felt most acutely during the annual olive harvest, with severe social and economic impacts on thousands of families. With the 2025 season approaching next month, now is the critical moment to mobilize support to ensure farmers can access their lands, unlike in the past two years.

Speakers:

Jessica Montell

Executive Director, [HaMoked – Center for the Defence of the Individual](#)

Yahav Erez

International Advocacy Coordinator, [Yesh Din – Volunteers for Human Rights](#)

Jalal Basheer

Mayor of the Palestinian village Jinsafut, where farmers are being denied access to their plots

Register for the Webinar

Urgent Letter Demanding an Investigation Against Maj. Gen. Avi Bluth Following His Order to Uproot Thousands of Olive Trees

On August 21, 2025, an order was given by the Military Commander of the West Bank, Avi Bluth, to cut down approximately 3,000 olive trees belonging to residents of the village of al-Mughayir. Soldiers forbade villagers from leaving their homes while military bulldozers destroyed their source of livelihood and income. In addition, soldiers raided homes in the village, causing extensive property damage. In Bluth's public statement, there was no attempt to hide the rationale for this unlawful measure. "Every village must know," he said, "that if they carry out an attack, they will pay a heavy price." The commander claimed that "the village produces attacks," attributing a shooting incident that occurred the previous day to the entire village, with its thousands of residents, and thus gave an official order to carry out collective punishment as policy.

Collective punishment contradicts the right to liberty and the right to a fair trial, and it is prohibited under international law - the very source of

the military commander's authority in the occupied territories - which stipulates that punishment for an offense must be based on individual responsibility.

On August 24, 2025, Yesh Din sent an urgent letter to the Attorney General, the Chief of Staff, the Chief Military Prosecutor, and the Legal Advisor for the West Bank demanding that they order an investigation against Maj. Gen. Bluth for issuing an order that constitutes a war crime. The letter states: "The Order signed by Maj. Gen. Bluth is unlawful, as it directly contravenes international law, which prohibits damage to private property and collective punishment. Moreover, not only is the Order itself draconian and unlawful, but its implementation also failed to comply with its own provisions. The residents were not given the opportunity to challenge the severe harm to their property. Although the Order provided only for pruning trees, in practice, thousands of trees were brutally uprooted from their roots. The illegality of the Order and its implementation is further compounded by the fact that, according to Maj. Gen. Bluth himself, its very purpose was to collectively punish the residents of al-Mughayir and to deter other villages.

[Read the appeal \(translated to English\)](#)

Urgent Appeal Against Collective Punishment

On September 8, 2025, Yesh Din submitted an urgent appeal to senior officials - the Attorney General, the Military Advocate General, the Military Legal Advisor to the West Bank, and the Chief of Staff - following media reports of planned punitive actions by military forces

against the Palestinian towns where a terror attack had come from. The appeal warned against carrying out reprisal measures and collective punishment, which constitute a war crime, and demanded that the plan be halted. This was a response to reports that the army intends to carry out extensive demolitions and land clearings, damaging the property of Palestinians who had no involvement whatsoever in planning or executing the attack, and against the backdrop of the recent uprooting of thousands of olive trees by the army in the village of al-Mughayyir.

Read the appeal (Hebrew)

Join Our WhatsApp Group for Diplomatic Updates

We invite you to join our WhatsApp group for diplomatic updates, in which we send periodic updates on important developments in the West Bank easily and conveniently. It is a 'silent' group, meaning only the administrators can post messages, and there are no conversations or debates. You are welcome to join and share the link with colleagues.

Join Yesh Din's new WhatsApp group

Follow Yesh Din on Twitter

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