



Yesh Din

Volunteers for Human Rights

The Current Situation in the West Bank

Almost two months have passed since the war broke out, and the situation on the ground in the West Bank continues to deeply concern Yesh Din (and the human rights community). Violence persists, causing immense damage to property, a mass of injuries and loss of lives.

[Yesh Din documented 283 incidents of violence between October 7 and November 20.](#) This marks a peak of settler violence unprecedented in both scope and severity. Settler attacks in the West Bank have taken the lives of nine Palestinians. In some incidents, settlers were armed, some wearing military or paramilitary gear. Settlers are often accompanied by military forces who either do nothing to stop the violence or actively participate. At least 46 incidents of violence involved live ammunition shot by Israeli forces, and military forces were present in 53 of the incidents. 15 communities have been forcibly transferred due to the violence. Palestinians seeking to harvest their olives continue to face severe

violence and theft, forcing many to abandon their crops, and inflicting serious damage to their livelihoods.

Blurring the Lines Between Settlers and Soldiers in the West Bank

It is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between Israeli soldiers and settlers. Yesh Din has witnessed an increase in violence and threats by Israelis who are not clearly identified as either soldiers or civilians.

Yesh Din has documented incidents in which it is not clear whether the perpetrators are settlers or soldiers. These individuals may be carrying weapons, wearing partial IDF uniforms (army pants and a black shirt, for example), with army vests and equipment, but wearing civilian shoes, not army boots, driving civilian vehicles, not army jeeps, or cars without license plates, which are illegal vehicles. We believe it may be related to the establishment of civilian emergency response teams in Israel and in the West Bank settlements. These teams operate in the settlements in which they reside, which means that they are armed with the goal of protecting their communities from expected attacks. ***However, we have documented incidents in which members of these teams have invaded Palestinian villages, which exceed their authority.***

We suspect that some of the military forces in the West Bank since the war broke out are in fact residents of settlements and outposts recruited as reservists, creating a situation where those who are obligated to protect the Palestinian population are themselves the perpetrators of violence against them.

In light of the increasing incidents of attacks by groups of Israelis whose identity as settlers or soldiers isn't clear, Yesh Din – together with other organizations - sent a letter on October 30, 2023, to the Central Command Major General. The letter detailed serious events where settlers entered Palestinian communities in military gear, in some incidents masked, violently attacked the residents, damaged property, and even instructed residents to leave their homes. This letter received no response, and these soldiers (seemingly reservists) remain stationed in the area, continuing to terrorize communities or assisting others in doing so.



Two Israelis wearing a combination of military gear & civilian clothing, invading a school in the village of a-Tuwani on November 12, 2023. Photo: a-Tuwani Village Council.

What Can Be Done?

Last week, Yesh Din sent yet another [urgent letter on this matter](#) together with Israeli organizations The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Bimkom and Haqel to the highest ranks in the military and in the Ministry of Defense. The following is a translation of a significant portion of the letter:

“This severe phenomenon, in which settlers enlisted into the reserves [or operate as members of emergency response teams] as a military force responsible for law enforcement in their residential areas, is exploited to harm, intimidate, and aggress against Palestinians. In recent weeks, this phenomenon has expanded to encompass the entire West Bank. While documentation of severe incidents is publicized in the media, a military spokesperson assures that investigations will be conducted, but the reality on the ground suggests almost complete immunity for reserve soldiers who harm Palestinians. The deployment of residents from settlements and settler outposts as part of the military force entrusted with law enforcement and the defense of the peace of Palestinian residents is an extremely unreasonable decision, indicating a significant breakdown of the army's duty to protect the vulnerable residents. Explicit support for settler violence, and even worse, its adoption by the military, is evident.

The severity and scale of these incidents, coupled with the failure of security services to protect Palestinian residents throughout the West

Bank, have prompted strong international criticism, demanding an end to this dangerous phenomenon. In response, a wide-ranging campaign was launched by [settler leaders](#), including [ministers](#) and [members of parliament](#), aimed at [denying the existence](#) of widespread violence. The campaign [claims that police data reflects a decrease in the number of violent incidents](#). [Yesh Din has [publicly proven](#) this claim false according to our data on the matter].

It is cynical to rely on a campaign that denies the reality and uses the number of complaints filed as proof; Palestinians in the West Bank have extremely limited access to filing complaints with the Israeli police, even prior to the war. However, since October 7, filing a complaint has become nearly impossible. Police stations in the West Bank are almost entirely located within the settlements, and if a Palestinian should try to file a complaint, coordination and accompaniment are required. Recently, wide-spread movement restrictions have been imposed throughout the West Bank, making it almost impossible for Palestinians to reach police stations. Despite repeated appeals from some of the signatory organizations in the past, they were denied access to the online system since it is available exclusively to Israeli citizens, including those living in the West Bank.

This systemic failure is not limited to blocking the option for Palestinians to file complaints at police stations or remotely. The police consistently refrain from handling incidents of violence incidents, even when reported while they are happening. The standard response from the 100 police hotline is that Palestinian residents must physically come to the police station to file a complaint. Given the numerous obstacles, it is not surprising that the Israeli police lack reliable data on the extent of settler violence against Palestinians and its severity. It appears that the unwillingness to provide Palestinians

with the option to file complaints remotely is not incidental but rather a policy dictated by the Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir. This can be inferred from reports stating that the minister prohibited a regional commander from participating in a discussion on settler violence with the Minister of Security. Ben-Gvir insisted on attending the discussion himself, [stating that there is no such thing as 'settler violence'](#), and those engaging in violence in the West Bank are Arabs and not Jews defending themselves.

When those entrusted with law enforcement lead a campaign denying the very existence of the well-documented phenomena of settler violence, the police become a tool for achieving political goals in the West Bank.

the District Coordination Offices (DCOs) (both Israeli and Palestinian) are reportedly also refusing to accept appeals from civilians, leaving Palestinians and their legal representatives with no one to report to when violent incidents occur.

The letter included a list of over 100 incidents of violence that occurred since October 7 documented by the different signatory organizations.

Our Demands

The urgent letter concluded with demands which are aimed at fulfilling the duty of the Israeli military to stop the violence and displacement, among which are:

1) Immediate removal of violent reserve soldiers, and initiation of legal proceedings against them.

- 2) Deployment of permanent security and patrol forces in areas prone to violence, reinforcing existing patrols.
- 3) Return of displaced communities to their homes and protection against further attacks.
- 4) Clear instructions to commanders and soldiers operating in these areas regarding their authority and duties in enforcing the law against Israeli citizens violating the law, including the authority to detain and arrest settlers suspected of committing criminal offenses.
- 5) Immediate availability of contact persons for handling incidents of violence, with contact details provided in both Hebrew and Arabic. These persons should be equipped to handle real-time reports, and their information should be publicly accessible.
- 6) Initiation of actions against commanders and soldiers who allow violent actions to occur.
- 7) Strict control and monitoring of weapons in the hands of settlers, especially when military weapons are used for illegitimate purposes in violent actions against Palestinians.
- 8) Investigation into all the events outlined in this appeal, as well as those detailed in our previous communications.

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