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West Bank: Israel Responsible for Rising Settler Violence

(Jerusalem) – The [Israeli](#) military either took part in or did not protect Palestinians from violent settler attacks in the West Bank that have [displaced](#) people from 20 communities and have entirely uprooted at least 7 communities since October 7, 2023, Human Rights Watch said today.

Israeli settlers have assaulted, tortured, and committed sexual violence against Palestinians, stolen their belongings and livestock, threatened to kill them if they did not leave permanently, and destroyed their homes and schools under the cover of the ongoing hostilities in Gaza. Many Palestinians, including entire communities, have fled their homes and lands. The military has not assured displaced residents that it will protect their security or allow them to return, forcing them to live in precarious conditions elsewhere.

“Settlers and soldiers have displaced entire Palestinian communities, destroying every home, with the apparent backing of higher Israeli authorities,” said [Bill Van Esveld](#), associate children’s rights director at Human Rights Watch. “While the attention of the world is focused on Gaza, abuses in the West Bank, fueled by decades of impunity and complacency among Israel’s allies, are soaring.”

Human Rights Watch investigated attacks that forcibly displaced all residents of [Khirbet Zanuta](#) and Khirbet al-Ratheem south of Hebron, al-Qanub east of Hebron, and Ein al-Rashash and Wadi al-Seeq, east of Ramallah, in October and November 2023. The evidence shows that armed settlers, with the active participation of army units, [repeatedly](#) cut

off road access and raided Palestinian communities, detained, assaulted, and tortured residents, chased them out of their homes and off their lands at gunpoint or coerced them to leave with death threats, and blocked them from taking their belongings.

Human Rights Watch spoke to 27 witnesses of the attacks, and viewed videos that residents filmed, showing harassment by men in Israeli military uniforms carrying M16 assault rifles. As of April 16, the Israel Defense Forces did not reply to questions Human Rights Watch sent by email on April 7.

Settler attacks on Palestinians [increased](#) in 2023 to their highest level since the UN began recording this data in 2006. This was the case even before the Hamas-led attacks on October 7 that killed about 1,100 people inside Israel.

Following October 7, the Israeli military called up 5,500 settlers who are Israeli army reservists, including some with criminal records of violence against Palestinians, and assigned them to West Bank “regional defense” battalions. The authorities distributed 7,000 guns to battalion members and others, including “[civilian security squads](#)” established in settlements, [according to Haaretz](#), and [Israeli rights groups](#). Media [reported](#) that settlers left leaflets and sent threats on social media to Palestinians after October 7, such as warnings to “[flee to Jordan](#)” or be “exterminate[d],” and that “[the day of revenge is coming](#).”

The UN has [recorded](#) more than 700 settler attacks between October 7 and April 3, with soldiers in uniform present in nearly half of the attacks. Attacks since October 7 have [displaced](#) over 1,200 people, including 600 children, from rural herding communities. At least 17 Palestinians were killed and 400 wounded, while Palestinians have killed 7 settlers in the West Bank since October 7, the UN [reported](#).

On April 12, the body of a 14-year-old Israeli boy [was found](#) after he had disappeared from the settlement outpost of Malachei Hashalom. Since then, settlers have attacked at least 17 Palestinian villages and communities in the West Bank, according to [OCHA](#). [Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights group](#), reported that four Palestinians, including a 16-year-old boy, have been [killed](#) in these incidents, and that [houses](#) and [vehicles](#) were set on fire, and livestock killed.

None of those evicted from the five communities investigated have been able to return, Human Rights Watch found. The Israeli military either rejected or did not answer requests to allow residents to return, leaving Palestinians without protection from the same armed settlers and soldiers who threatened to kill them if they returned. One family with seven children, forced to flee on foot from al-Qanub, now lives in a small cinderblock storeroom with no money to pay the rent.

[Haqel: In Defense of Human Rights](#), an Israeli human rights organization, petitioned the Israeli High Court to instruct the army to protect five Palestinian communities from threats of displacement due to settler violence, and to allow Khirbet Zanuta families to return to their lands. The Israeli state attorney's February 20 response claimed that no forced displacement occurred in Khirbet Zanuta, and that Palestinians had left voluntarily due to herding and agricultural problems, according to Haqel. The next hearing in the case is scheduled for May 1.

The displaced residents raised sheep. Some said that Israeli attackers stole vehicles, cash, and household appliances, as well as sheep and fodder that families had bought on credit and now cannot repay. Other families escaped with their flocks but had to build new shelters and have nowhere to graze them.

Settlers have subsequently been grazing their own sheep on the communities' lands, according to rights groups. The Israeli rights group [B'Tselem reported](#) that as of mid-March, settlers had taken over 4,000 dunams (about 988 acres) of Palestinian grazing lands since October 7.

Repeated settler attacks, often at night, have [caused](#) fear and mental health harm. Children and their parents said children have had nightmares and difficulty concentrating. The attacks destroyed schools in two of the five communities. Most children were unable to go to school for a month or longer after being displaced.

The Israeli police have law-enforcement jurisdiction over settlers, while [the army has jurisdiction over Palestinians](#) in the occupied West Bank. After October 7, Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir instructed police not to enforce the law against violent settlers, an Israeli investigative journalist [reported](#). Police denied the report, though Ben-Gvir [did not](#). The vast majority of Palestinian complaints against settlers and the Israeli military do not result in indictments, based on [official data compiled](#) by Yesh Din.

After October 7, the National Security Ministry [distributed](#) thousands of guns, including to settlers. In December, the Attorney General's Office [stated](#) in the Knesset that they had found the Ministry had unlawfully approved 14,000 firearms permits.

Countries including the United States, [Germany](#), [Italy](#), and the [United Kingdom](#) have licensed exports of weapons, including assault rifles and ammunition, to Israel. The US has approved more than 100 weapons transfers to Israel since October 7, and [exported](#) 8,000 military rifles and 43,000 handguns in 2023, before [pausing](#) a shipment of 24,000 assault rifles in December over concerns about settler attacks. It is "almost a certainty" that settlers are using US-made guns, a former US State Department official [said](#).

Since December, the [United Kingdom](#), the [United States](#), and France announced visa policies that barred some violent settlers from entry. The [US](#) and [UK](#) imposed financial sanctions on a total of eight settlers and two settlement outposts. EU sanctions are [still being discussed](#), due to staunch reluctance by the Czech Republic and Hungary.

Forcible transfer or deportation and the extensive destruction and appropriation of property in occupied territory are war crimes. Israeli authorities' systematic oppression of and inhumane acts against Palestinians, including war crimes, committed with the intent to maintain the domination of Jewish Israelis over Palestinians, amount to the crimes against humanity of [apartheid](#) and persecution.

Governments should suspend military support to Israel, given the risk of complicity in abuses. They should also review and possibly [suspend](#) bilateral agreements, such as the EU-Israel Association Agreement, and [ban trade](#) with settlements in the occupied territories. The UK should immediately withdraw the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill, which restricts public bodies in the UK from deciding not to do business with companies' operating in illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

The US, the EU, UK, and other countries should take action to ensure accountability for those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including criminal investigations and prosecutions under universal jurisdiction and at the International Criminal Court. This should include those responsible under command responsibility for failures to prevent or punish crimes by those in their chain of command.

In addition, they should consider sanctions on those responsible for ongoing Israeli attacks on Palestinian communities or for the prevention of displaced Palestinians from returning to their lands, until those subject to sanctions end the attacks and ensure the displaced Palestinians can return, Human Rights Watch said.

"Palestinian children have seen their families brutalized, and their homes and schools destroyed, and the Israeli authorities are ultimately to blame," Van Esveld said. "Senior state officials are fueling or failing to prevent these attacks, and Israel's allies are not doing enough to stop that."

Israeli Attacks Investigated

***** Names have been changed for people's protection.**

Al-Qanub

Settler attacks forced the residents of al-Qanub, 10 kilometers east of the town of Sa'ir, near Hebron in the southern West Bank, to flee on the

evening of October 9. The community of about 40 people have been unable to return.

From October 7 to 9, ten to twelve settlers in civilian clothes, armed with handguns and assault rifles, piled up stones each day to block the only road to al-Qanub, which links it to the town of Sa'ir, said Salma, a 29-year-old resident who fled with her husband, Salim, and their seven children.

At 4:30 p.m. on October 9, dozens of armed settlers arrived. "Some went to [get] the sheep, and nine of them came to us," Salim said. "They had guns and knives." Settlers ordered them to leave within an hour or they would be killed, and one man said he would "cut our throats, and pointed at us, including our kids."

Dozens of men, with dogs, stole and led the 200 sheep that Salim and his father owned toward a settlement outpost, Salim said. He and several neighbors ran toward them, but "that seemed to trigger [the settlers]." His father feared they would open fire and warned the residents to leave. The men, and women and children fled in different groups: "I told my wife to take the kids and run."

Salma carried her 8-month-old boy and walked with her other children through rocky terrain for more than five hours in the dark, until 10 p.m., to reach her parents' home, she said.

Salim, 35, his father, 75, and his children were all born in al-Qanub. "All our life was there," he said. He is 18,000 shekels (about US\$4,800) in debt for sheep fodder that settlers stole, he said. The family is living in a windowless, cinderblock storeroom in a nearby town, with no income to pay the rent.

Settlers from an outpost 400 meters away west of al-Qanub, began harassing residents five years ago, Salim said. It appears the settlers came from the outpost of Pnei Kedem North. Settlers prevented residents from grazing their sheep, and "cut the electricity, and three months ago they cut the water. They even took the pipes." In December 2021, settlers set dogs on two brothers in al-Qanub and hit one brother with an all-terrain vehicle, and in February 2022, settlers attacked the brothers' father, 76, fracturing two of his fingers and his skull, the rights group B'Tselem reported.

Wadi al-Seeq

Attacks involving armed settlers in civilian clothes and an Israel Defense Forces unit displaced all 30 families – about 180 people, including 90 children – from Wadi al-Seeq, northeast of Ramallah, on October 12, based on residents' and human rights groups' accounts, as well as Israeli news reports.

Beginning on October 7, settlers gathered daily at the entrance of the road that leads to the community. At 8 p.m. on October 11, a group of 8 to 10 men in military uniforms, armed with M16s and some wearing masks, arrived in two trucks, said 46-year-old Abu Hasan.

The uniformed men first entered the tents belonging to Abu Nayef and his sons, destroyed and stole the family's belongings, then searched other people's tents until around 3 a.m., Abu Hasan said.

Later that morning, a [prominent local settler](#), armed and wearing civilian clothes, led a group of armed men wearing military uniforms without name tags who had arrived in civilian cars in blocking an access road, while a military vehicle and two police patrol vehicles were stationed nearby, four residents said.

Four vehicles with soldiers, some of whom residents recognized as settlers from prior attacks, then entered Wadi al-Seeq, residents said. The soldiers took residents' phones, car keys, and IDs, hit people, and entered tents where women and children were taking cover, and threw belongings on the ground, said 30-year-old Marwan M.

The attackers said they would shoot residents if they did not leave within an hour. Abu Bashar said: "They said, you can't take anything with you, and even the cars were forbidden." About 30 people were wounded in the attack, according to [news reports](#).

Soldiers entered Reem R.'s tent, shoved her and her children, and took their phones, she said. "One man in uniform kicked me in the back of my neck. They said, 'Go to the valley, and if you come back, we will kill you.'" As she was fleeing, Reem saw her 20-year-old son, who has a congenital bone condition and a physical disability, lying on the ground, with a settler "stomping on his back," she said. The women and children, including two with physical disabilities, fled to a cave, where they sheltered for eight hours without food or water, or their phones, until around 8 p.m., then walked toward the town of Taybeh, Reem said.

Meanwhile, soldiers forced Marwan M., Abu Hasan, and a third man, Nadim N., onto the ground, bound them, and hit, kicked, and beat them with their gun butts, they said. Another group of soldiers arrived and left, and a civilian vehicle arrived with men in military uniforms. Soldiers dragged the three men to a sheep pen, blindfolded and stripped them to their underwear, replaced the zip-tie on Abu Hasan's wrists with painful metal wire, and for more than two hours, beat and kicked the men in the head and face. Nadim N. was burned with cigarettes. Marwan M. lost consciousness, he said. The attackers posted images of the men online.

"They took turns beating us, over and over, with threats like, 'When you die your wife won't be able to feed your children'," Abu Hasan said. One

man urinated on him, and another kicked him in the chest, stomach, and genitals. "I was screaming in pain. After that he brought a broom handle, jumped on my back, hit me with it and tried to shove it in my anus."

Abu Hasan said the attackers stole three phones and 2,700 shekels (about US\$700) in cash from the three men, and other belongings. In the evening, an Israeli military medic arrived with other soldiers. Marwan M. said, "they gave me glucose, and apologized. We told them how they stole our cars, phones, money, everything, and insisted that they get our things back, but they didn't respond [to our requests]." He and Abu Hasan were hospitalized.

About five days later, Israeli authorities in two police cars escorted some residents back for two hours to retrieve their belongings, Reem R. said. Her household's mattresses, blankets, clothes, electrical equipment, refrigerator, car trailer, 250 chickens, and 35,000 shekels (about US\$9,400) worth of sheep fodder that was bought on credit, were missing, she said. Other residents' documents, including birth and marriage certificates, were burned or missing, and two cars, water tanks, donkeys, chickens, and 13 sheep had been stolen, Abu Bashir said. Their homes had been destroyed.

Residents said they filed a complaint at the police station in the Binyamin settlement but have heard nothing since. The military asked two men to submit complaints.

The soldiers involved in the attack were part of the military's Desert Frontier unit, which recruits residents of settlement outposts, including some settlers with [criminal records](#), Haaretz [reported](#). The military dismissed the commander in October in response to reports about the attack, and in December, dismissed five combat soldiers and [froze](#) the unit's operations following additional violent incidents, Haaretz [reported](#). Human Rights Watch is not aware of anyone having been prosecuted in relation to the events.

In December, the Israeli military filed an order barring the settler leader from most of the West Bank, for three months. He [appealed](#) the order. The US [sanctioned](#) him in March.

Reem R. and her family are sheltering in a tent on the outskirts of Taybeh. Her children were out of school for more than two months. The school in Wadi al-Seeq, which opened in 2017 and had over 100 students in grades 1 through 8, including children from neighboring communities, was [destroyed](#) after the attack.

The families were originally displaced during the 1948 war from what is now Israel. Between 2010 and 2023, the Israeli military issued demolition orders for 110 structures in the community, including the school, for

lacking building permits, which are [almost impossible](#) for Palestinians to obtain.

Settlers began herding sheep on the community's lands and harassing residents in February 2023. On August 3, settlers beat children and youth with sticks and tried to steal their sheep, residents said. The army arrested three men who prevented the theft and detained 35-year-old Karim K. on charges of assault and resisting arrest, which his uncle said were bogus. He was released in February on bail and a third-party guarantee.

Khirbet al-Ratheem

Between October 14 and 23, the entire community of about 50 people in Khirbet al-Ratheem, in the southern West Bank, was displaced due to attacks by armed men in military uniforms whom community residents recognized as settlers from previous attacks, accompanied by other soldiers whom residents did not recognize.

Settlers began to harass Khirbet al-Ratheem in 2021, destroying crops and raiding homes at night, former residents said.

On October 7, 2023, soldiers arrived and warned the community not to leave their homes or graze their sheep and blocked all the roads. On October 8, settlers attacked the home of 50-year-old Ghassan G., his 44-year-old wife Farah, and their three children under the age of 18; destroyed two water cisterns; and smashed their solar panels with stones.

At 10 p.m. on October 12, five masked, armed men in military uniforms forced three nearby households into Ghassan's tent, dragging Ghassan's elderly father, who had difficulty walking, and pointing an M16 at his head, Farah said. One man told them, "You have 24 hours to leave, [or] we will kill you and take your sheep," Ghassan said. The attackers punctured their water tanks and cut their gas and water pipes. Ghassan called a humanitarian agency and the nearby municipality of al-Samu'a to help them evacuate but was told it was not possible to coordinate with the Israeli military, he said.

On the night of October 13, masked and armed soldiers, whom a family member identified by their voices as "settlers we're used to," entered the family home again, threatened them and demanded their phones. The family member, who hid her phone and video camera, showed Human Rights Watch videos of prior settler attacks.

As Ghassan's extended family were leaving on October 14, settlers returned and forced them face-down on the ground, beating, kicking, and threatening to kill them, family members said. The family escaped to the town of al-Samu'a, 15 kilometers away, with 220 sheep, a few solar panels,

appliances, and mattresses. A neighbor later filmed a settler bulldozing their home.

Ghassan had to build a sheep shelter on the outskirts of al-Samu'a, at a cost of 50,000 shekels (about US \$13,400), and buy fodder. Previously, the sheep had grazed on 30 dunams (about 7 acres) of land.

The extended family of 76-year-old Abu A. and his wife, Lana, who have five children under the age of 18 along with adult children and their families, lived nearby. On October 8 or 9, men Abu A. recognized as settlers from an outpost of the Asa'el settlement entered their home and warned them to leave or "we'll cut your throats." His family found the slain body of one of their sheep next to their door, on October 11. At 11 p.m. on October 12 or 13, settlers smashed their solar panels, Abu A. said.

At 9 p.m. on October 16, five masked men, one wearing a military uniform and carrying an M16 assault rifle, arrived at Abu A.'s home, "shoved me on the ground, and the one in uniform kicked me in my stomach and hit me in the forehead with the butt of his gun." The men punctured a water tank and warned them to leave by October 21 "or we will burn you." Lana was hiding inside with her daughter in law and her daughters, including Anan, 8. Anan said she was very scared and "hid inside the closet and looked through the keyhole."

Abu A.'s son, lyad, said that on October 20, a group of uniformed Israeli forces detained him and three of his brothers. Some soldiers beat and stomped on them, and warned them to leave, as other soldiers "sat on the side," lyad said.

At noon on October 21, as the family was leaving with their belongings, three soldiers armed with M16s, blindfolded and zip-tied lyad. lyad said he was hit on the head with gun butts, taken to an outpost and then to two settlements, and finally to an army base in the Otniel settlement. He was released at 10 p.m. after Israeli police came to the settlement. A photograph taken on October 22 shows lyad's swollen hands and raw marks on his wrists, consistent with zip tie restraints.

Abu A., who has 11 siblings, said his family had owned 600 dunams (about 148 acres) of land in the area, where he was born in 1947. His family are now in al-Samu'a, but he could not graze his herd, forcing him to sell 100 of his sheep. He had previously sold his six cows after the Israeli military prevented him from accessing their grazing lands. "We are in debt, [and] we don't have any income," he said.

Three brothers from another branch of the family were forced to leave by soldiers whom residents recognized as settlers. One of the brothers, 43-year-old Ayman A., said that after October 7, settlers wearing military-

uniform pants, driving a bulldozer and two cars, repeatedly threatened him, his wife and their seven children to leave “or we will burn you.”

On October 23, uniformed soldiers whom Ayman described as settlers, fired their M16s in the air and “threw us onto the ground.” He and his brothers, Mohammed and Amer, said settlers hit them and stomped on their backs. At around 9 p.m., the brothers and their families fled to al-Samu’a but had to leave behind their furniture and appliances.

Their wives and children are staying in a relative’s home in al-Samu’a, while the brothers and their older sons are staying close to a shelter they built for their 150 sheep. “It cost 8,000 shekels [US \$2,100] for a bulldozer to clear the ground,” and thousands more in building materials, Ayman said. The sheep, cut off from grazing lands, need 125 kilograms of fodder each day.

Schools in the area switched to online education after October 7 due to the movement restrictions Israel imposed. Only 5 out of 23 schoolchildren in the extended family had devices or phones and were able to attend online classes, a family member said. Some schools reopened in mid-December.

Khirbet Zanuta

Human Rights Watch interviewed members of the extended S. and N. families who fled Khirbet Zanuta, in the southern West Bank, on November 1 due to settler attacks. The entire community of more than [140 people](#) was displaced.

Saleh S., 38, and his wife and four children, ages 5 to 11, said their families had lived in Khirbet Zanuta “since our grandparents’ days.” Settlers established a nearby outpost three years ago and repeatedly harassed the community. After October 7, “they entered the house, cursing at us, harassing the children, swearing at them. It was every other day, if not in the morning, then at night,” Saleh said.

On October 7, settlers bulldozed and blocked the entrance to the road into Khirbet Zanuta from al-Dhahiriya, eight kilometers away, said Saleh’s sister, Abier, 45. In the following weeks, settlers regularly threw stones at their homes at night, hitting the metal roof. “For 10 days we weren’t able to sleep,” said Saleh’s brother Sami, 53, who lived nearby with his wife and three children, two of them under 18. Settlers smashed Saleh’s solar panels and windows and destroyed several residents’ cars.

On October 31, six armed settlers drove all-terrain vehicles to the home of Saleh’s brother Mahmoud, 42, his wife and three children, ages 2 to 9. They detained and beat him, Mahmoud said. Mahmoud said: “They were choking me, I thought they were going to kill me. They hit me with their M16s, all over, [on] my back, my arms. They cursed me and threatened

my family, in Arabic and Hebrew. They threw me on the ground. There were cactus spines stuck in me.”

Saleh and Mahmoud said that they recognized the leader of the settlers who warned residents to leave their homes after October 7. This man had previously carried an M16 or a handgun and led settlers who cut water pipes, punctured water tanks, and used a drone to terrify the family’s sheep, Saleh and Mahmoud said. On November 1, the extended family fled. Sami said settlers armed with M16s “threw rocks at us even while we were leaving.” “We took the solar panels, the sheep, and our [kitchen] cutlery,” but had to leave everything else, said his sister, Abier. The family had to let their 100 pigeons go free. They rented three large trucks to help move their 300 sheep, at a cost of around 3,200 shekels (about US\$860).

The family paid 60,000 shekels (US\$16,000) to build a new sheep shelter, but without access to their lands, including four water cisterns, they cannot afford to keep the flock. The three brothers built rooms to live in, one per family, in a field near al-Dhahiriya. Saleh said, “I haven’t been able to sleep, I haven’t been able to eat. They forced a *Nakba* [catastrophe] on us.”

Munir and Sara N., both 38, and their nine children lived in another part of Khirbet Zanuta. At 7 a.m., a few days after October 7, settlers in two trucks, armed with assault rifles, accompanied by soldiers, beat six of Munir’s neighbors, threatening to shoot them. Settlers smashed the windows of a neighbor’s Mitsubishi truck and the windows of nearby houses.

Two days later, at 10 p.m., soldiers and settlers returned. One man threw a stun grenade inside the family home, where the children were sleeping, Sara said. Her daughter, Yara, 13, said, “The soldiers threw a sound bomb [stun grenade] close to us and I got very scared.” “The weapons terrify the younger kids, and we were afraid for their lives,” Munir said.

At midnight, several days later, eight or nine settlers arrived, accompanied by a military vehicle from which three soldiers descended. Settlers assaulted four families living nearby, beat Munir with the butts of their guns, and warned, “You have 24 hours to leave, or we’ll set fire to you.” The next day the family rented trucks at a cost of 2,100 shekels (about US\$560) to move their livestock, which now shelter in an unfinished building.

After October 7, settlers also repeatedly flew drones over the family’s penned-in flock of 250 sheep, causing them to panic and trample one another, killing 10 sheep, Munir said.

“We’re all in debt,” Munir said. “If anyone would provide safety and protection for my children from settlers, we would go back [home].” On

January 31, rights activists [filmed](#) settlers fencing off Khirbet Zanuta's lands.

Sara's children had gone to school in Khirbet Zanuta before October 7, but afterward, schools shifted to online learning, "and we don't have internet devices."

The school had 27 students from kindergarten to 6th grade, an education official said. It was burned in an apparent arson attack on November 20, and filmed on November 21 by a member of B'tselem, who [posted](#) photos and videos online. The school, [built with humanitarian support](#) from the EU, the UK, and other European countries, was later bulldozed.

The school's kindergarten was subsidized and cost parents 150 shekels (about US \$40) per year. Nadia, age 4, who had attended the kindergarten, said, "I saw it burned [on social media]. All of it. I got sad, and I started yelling. I used to play with doctor tools, kitchen tools, dolls, and Barbies." Nadia's family cannot afford the kindergarten where they are displaced, which costs 200 shekels (about US\$53) per month.

School officials partnered with civil society groups to offer psycho-social support programs, a weekly health clinic, and purchased hearing aids for one student, the education official said. "The students lost so much with the loss of the school," he said.

Ein al-Rashash

All eight families living in Ein al-Rashash fled on October 13 fearing further settler violence, and Bedouin families in the area were also displaced that week due to threats, according to residents and [news reports](#).

The Israeli military has since 2010 issued [demolition](#) orders against 73 structures in Ein al-Rashash. Settlers began harassing the community in 2014 after establishing a herding outpost, called [Angels of Peace](#), in a former military base, led by a settler whom residents identified by his first name.

On October 8, the same men appeared in uniform, carrying M16 assault rifles, and blocked the road to the community, said Wesam W., 25. On October 11 and 12, settlers [killed](#) six Palestinians in Qusra, about 10 kilometers north of Ein al-Rashash. Fearing a deadly attack, on October 13, the entire community "decided to leave, for our safety and dignity," said Wesam's brother Omar, 33. Omar, his wife, and six children, walked to the nearby town of Maghayir.

On October 27, two Israeli rights activists drove Omar back to Ein al-Rashash, hoping to recover some belongings. He found that 18 tents, a car trailer, appliances, solar panels, and sheep fodder that cost 150,000 shekels (about US\$40,000) were missing, he said. Seven settlers wearing

civilian clothes then arrived on foot and hit and kicked them, said Wesam and one of the activists.

Community members said the Israeli police in the Binyamin settlement would not allow them to file a complaint unless they did so in person, but they declined because police had previously detained and interrogated them about false complaints by settlers.

Omar's grandparents fled to the West Bank in 1948 as refugees from what is now Israel. The family is now renting a 7-room house in Maghayir, for 35 people. They cannot graze their flock.

Correction

April 17, 2024: This report was adjusted to clarify that the human rights organization, Haqel: In Defense of Human Right, petitioned the Israeli High Court to instruct the army to protect five Palestinian communities from displacement threats and allow displaced families from Khirbet Zanuta to return, where the Israeli state attorney, in a February 20 response, claimed that no forced displacement had occurred in Khirbet Zanuta.

Associated documents

Document ID 2108486 Translation / language version

17 April 2024 | [HRW – Human Rights Watch](#) (Author)

Israel, State of Palestine

West Bank: Article on assaults, torture and sexual violence against Palestinians committed by Israeli settlers

[Cisjordanie : Israël est responsable de la montée de la violence des colons](#) (Appeal or News Release, French)

fr

[ID 2108487](#)

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Israel, State of Palestine

West Bank: Article on assaults, torture and sexual violence against Palestinians committed by Israeli settlers

Westjordanland: Israel verantwortlich für zunehmende Angriffe
gewalttätiger Siedler*innen (Appeal or News Release, German)

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