

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	762
Land:	Gaza-Vestbredden
Kilde:	Euromedrights
Titel:	It's not only Gaza – The EU must act to end forced displacement and settler violence in the West Bank
Udgivet:	17. april 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	2. august 2024



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It's not only Gaza – The EU must act to end forced displacement and settler violence in the West Bank

17 Apr 2024

Since October 7th the world has been gripped by images of violence perpetrated against civilians in Gaza, a consequence of Israel's war against Palestinians. As of 08 April 2024, Gaza's Ministry of Health reported that over

33.137 Palestinians have been killed and 75.750 others are injured. Israel's deliberate blockade and bombardment of Gaza have plunged the region into a dire humanitarian crisis, with an alarming 500,000 Gazans facing imminent starvation and over 80% of the population displaced internally.

However, the Israeli war against Palestinians is not limited to Gaza, extending to all levels of Palestinian society. In the West Bank, incidents of violence against Palestinians have surged, with 456 killed since October 7th, of whom a quarter were children. Part of these murders can be attributed to actions by the Israeli armed forces, but a significant number stem from violent attacks by settlers, a trend that has escalated recently. According to the Jerusalem Legal Aid Center (JLAC), 564 incidents of settler violence have been recorded since the start of the war, with 80 involving physical assaults, averaging to seven incidents daily. Settler violence has forced Palestinians out of their indigenous lands, with 15 communities being fully expelled. Displacement occurs amidst a backdrop of violence, theft, property destruction, and the ominous specter of murder. Additionally, the Israeli government has ordered 274 demolitions of Palestinian structures in occupied territories, resulting in the displacement of a further 711 individuals. Settler violence in the oPt enjoys with near-total impunity, shielded by Israeli soldiers during their harassment of Palestinian communities, and rarely facing legal accountability. According to Yesh Din, only 3% of all investigations opened on settler violence ever led to a conviction.

As the occupying power, Israel is bound by the IV Geneva Convention to safeguard the well-being of the occupied population. Moreover, the Convention expressly prohibits the destruction of private property except when militarily necessity and prohibits the transfer of its own population into occupied territories. Israel's actions violate these fundamental principles of international law, demanding urgent international accountability for its disregard for legal obligations.

In light of these facts, we urge the European Union (EU) to undertake a thorough review of its EU-Israel Association Council. There is significant evidence that Israel is failing to uphold its obligations under the Association Agreement, particularly concerning the respect for human rights. Additionally, we call upon the EU to publicly demand Israel's adherence to the IV Geneva Convention as an occupying power. This entails ceasing settlement construction, prosecuting perpetrators of settler violence, and ensuring the well-being of Palestinian civilians. Furthermore, we urge the EU to advocate for an immediate cessation of the occupation, allowing Palestinians to exercise their fundamental right to self-determination. Echoing actions taken by the United States and the United Kingdom, we ask the EU to impose sanctions against violent settlers and illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, as they are in violation of international law. Lastly, the EU must actively support international efforts aimed at ensuring Israeli accountability for war crimes in Gaza. This includes endorsing the International Criminal Court's (ICC) investigations and lending support to the ongoing proceedings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding the legal ramifications of the occupation.

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