



Architecture of Displacement and Replacement: Settler Terror in the Occupied West Bank

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Every day, news from the occupied West Bank brings yet another story of Israeli settler terror: a village set on fire, Palestinians assaulted, shot at and killed, homes attacked, property destroyed, olives uprooted, entire lands and groves destroyed, and Palestinian families displaced. The scale, frequency, and geographical spread of these attacks have reached unprecedented levels, leaving entire Palestinian villages living under the constant threat of violence. The unfathomable amount of footage of this documented terror is undeniably gruesome, so is the devastation. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) announced that it has documented more than 1,330 incidents of settler violence in the occupied West Bank since the beginning of 2026 alone.¹ That's an average of nearly 4 settler attacks per day. Still, if we look beyond the daily headlines and rising statistics on settler violence in the West Bank, we need to challenge 2 mainstream misconceptions: first, settler terror isn't a "new" rising phenomenon detached from the past context of Israel's colonization of Palestine; and second, settler terror is not a result of settlers' extremist who operate outside of Israel's control. Rather, it is a central pillar of its policies, a key tool of dispossession and displacement.

Settler violence and terror in the West Bank comes in a context that long predates the alarming surge in the number and scale of attacks: It is deeply rooted in Israel's history. It is through violence and terror like the one being practiced in the West Bank right now that Israel was founded, in what we Palestinians call our Nakba, the catastrophe of 1948. During the Nakba, armed Zionist settler militias, called the "Haganah", violently paved the way by displacing approximately 700,000 Palestinians while simultaneously reinstalling the waves of settlers to replace the displaced Palestinian population with settlers flooding from Europe.

The story of the deliberate displacement of Palestinians from their lands never stopped, and it is the terrifying reality in the occupied West Bank today: According to a report by UNOCHA,

¹ UNOCHA

<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/opt-humanitarian-situation-report-23-july-2026>

between January 2023 and July 2026, 123 Palestinian communities experienced full or partial displacement, including 47 communities that were fully displaced as a result.

Once this context is understood, it becomes possible to move beyond the misconception that settler terror is the work of a few extremist settler groups acting ‘in spite of Israel’; rather, it actually occurs because of it: the ideology, structures, laws and policies it upholds to protect and sustain this exact violence. While there is an overwhelming international consensus on the illegality of Israeli settlements under international law, amounting to war crimes, Israel, however, specifically in its Nation-State Law, which holds a quasi-constitutional status, considers them a **national value** that the state shall encourage and promote. As a result, the settlement enterprise enjoys extensive political, legal, judicial, and institutional support and protection.

Settlements necessarily bring settlers with them, who are offered a wide set of incentive packages to relocate into these settlements. Beyond these socio-economic benefits, Israel deliberately arms the settlers. Notably following October 2023, the Israeli government expanded eligibility for firearms licenses, approving the distribution of thousands of additional weapons to increase support for armed settlement militias, which have reached approximately 800 militias across the West Bank now. Earlier in March 2026, Israeli Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir announced an expansion of the criteria for issuing firearm licenses for settlers; this decision allows approximately 300,000 Israeli settlers to easily obtain firearm licenses.² The arming of settlers has immediately translated into sky-rocketing attacks against Palestinian civilians in their towns and villages.

Settler terror is also legitimized and often incited by the top Israeli political leadership through a discourse that glorifies settlements and presents violence against Palestinians as an imperative to “defend” the settlers and the land that should belong to them from Palestinians.

Equally significant in understanding the level of official protection of settler violence is the pervasive lack of accountability. Settler perpetrators of the most heinous crimes against Palestinians are almost never held accountable. Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organization, found in its data sheet (2024-2025) that 94% of cases of settler attacks against Palestinians are closed without indictment.

Understanding this is crucial to any meaningful discussion about international accountability: it is not sufficient to sanction a few “extremist” settlers while leaving intact the system responsible for placing them in occupied territory, incentivizing their presence, arming them, inciting their crimes, protecting them from accountability, and using them to forcibly expel Palestinians and take over their lands.

As we painfully commemorate the dreadful attacks of settler terror in Duma, when settlers firebombed a Palestinian house on 13 July 2015, killing 3 members of a Palestinian family, and leaving one child with critical injuries, let us remind ourselves that if the visibility, intensity, scale

² BIHR,

<https://balasan.org/arming-settlers-under-the-pretext-of-regional-threat-from-regional-war-to-the-generalization-of-organized-settler-violence-in-the-occupied-west-bank-and-jerusalem/>

and shameless confidence of settler terror is spreading as it is in the West Bank, it is due to absolute impunity. Our documentation in the field always proves that failure to ensure accountability will always expand the scale of the terror, and settler terror is far from being exceptional; it is a recurring feature of Israel's systematic, deliberate forcible displacement policy targeting the entirety of the occupied West Bank.