

THE ELIMINATION PROJECT

Israel's Systematic Dismantling of
Palestinian Collective Life in the West Bank

September 2026

בצלם
B'TSELEM
بتسيلم

Contents 2

1. INTRODUCTION 6

2. METHODOLOGY 10

3. THE ELIMINATION PROJECT: POLITICAL FRAMEWORK 13

The Logic of Elimination within Settler Colonialism 15

Manifestations of Elimination under the Israeli Regime 17

Recent Years: Intensification, Acceleration and Exposure of Israel's Logic of Elimination 24

The Decisive Plan: An Ideological and Operational Framework for Implementing the Logic of Elimination 30

The Mechanism of Elimination in the West Bank 34

4. THE MECHANISM OF ELIMINATION IN THE WEST BANK 47

A. Violence and Intimidation 47

Introduction 47

Violence in the West Bank Amid the Genocide in Gaza 49

The Israeli Military: From Sporadic Raids to Permanent Destruction 50

Open-Fire Policy 53

Background: The Israeli Military's Open-Fire Policy 53

October 2023 Onward 55

Changes to the Open-Fire Policy During Military Operations 61

Changes to the Open-Fire Policy During Routine Military Activity 62

One System: Cooperation Between the Military and Settlers 67

2022 Onward: The Era of Pogroms 67

October 2023 Onward: Blurring the Distinction Between Agents of Violence 72

Instigating Friction as a Strategy 72

Regional Defense Battalions 76

Attacking in Full View of the Cameras 79

A Routine of Intimidation 81

Military Presence 81

Settlers Making a Show of Presence 82

Surveillance, Threats and Extortion 83

Abuse and Dehumanization 85

Abuse and Torture 85

Torture in Shin Bet Interrogations 88

Sexual Violence 88

Desecration of Bodies 89

The Effects of Violence: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Other Forms of Mental Distress 91

B. Movement Restrictions 95

Introduction 95

Historical Foundations of Movement Restriction 97

Movement Restrictions: The Current Situation 99

Entry into Areas Within the Green Line and "Border Crossings" 99

The Separation Barrier 100

Between the Green Line and the Separation Barrier: The "Seam Zone" 102

Allenby Crossing 103

The Apartheid Road System 104

A New Military Barrier in the Northern Jordan Valley 106

Arbitrariness, Flying Checkpoints, and Village Closures 109

Violence at Checkpoints 111

Settler Roadblocks: Institutionalized Blurring of Boundaries 113

The Effects of Restrictions on Freedom of Movement 116

Harm to Employment 116

Denial of Access to Health Care 118

Denial of Access to Education 120

The Destruction of Personal Life: Family, Social Life, and Political Organizing 122

C. Economic Strangulation 124

Introduction 124

Historical Foundations: Subordinating the Palestinian Economy 125

The First Intifada, 1987 126

The Oslo Accords and Paris Protocol (Economic Annex) 127

The Shift to Full Economic Strangulation 128

Strangulation of the Banking System 129

The Current Situation: A Destroyed Economy 131

Revocation of Work Permits 131

Social Consequences of Revoking Work Permits 133

Damage to Infrastructure 136

Electricity 136

Cooking Gas and Fuel 137

Water 138

Sanitation, Sewage and Wastewater 139

Quarries 141

Industrial Zones 141

Communications and Digital Infrastructure 142

Destruction of Private Sources of Income: Harm to Agriculture 142

Denial of Access to Land 142
Damage to the Olive Sector 144
The Grape Sector 146
Shepherding 147
Destruction of Greenhouses 148
Movement Restrictions and Their Impact on Economic Strangulation 149
The Social Consequences of Economic Strangulation 150
Effect on the Education System 151
Damage to the Healthcare System 152
Food Insecurity 154

D. Social and Political Destruction 157
Introduction 157
Suppressing Freedom of Association 160
The Shift from Associations and Committees to Formal Organizations 162
October 2023 Onward: Unprecedented Targeting of Collective Organizing and Accelerated Closure of Civil Society Organizations 164
Suppression of Demonstrations and Nonviolent Protest 166
Attacks on Spaces Where Collective Consciousness Is Formed 170
Community, Culture, and Religion 170
The Education System: Schools and Academia 172
Censorship of Textbooks 173
The Education System since October 2023 174
Academic Institutions since October 2023 178
Erasing and Replacing Identity Markers in Public Space: The Flag 180
Attacks on Freedom of Expression and the Press 182
Surveillance and Arrests Over Social Media Posts 182
The Press 184
Arrests and Incarceration 187
The Role of the Palestinian Authority 188

E. Ethnic Cleansing and Territorial Takeover: Dispossession, Land Grab and Expulsion 190
Introduction 190
How Israel Takes Over Land in the West Bank 193
Declaring Land as "State Land" 193
"Closed Military Zones" and Firing Zones 193
Declaring Nature Reserves 194
Historical Research and Archaeological Preservation 195
Planning Policy and Home Demolitions 197

2022 Onward: Accelerating Ethnic Cleansing and Territorial Takeover 199
The Settlement Administration 199
The Settlement Division 200
Repeal of the Disengagement Law 201
Advancing Land Registration 202
Expulsion of Communities 203
Farm Outposts 205
The Expulsion Process 207
Nowhere is Safe Place: The Establishment of Outposts, Attacks, and the Expulsion of Communities from Areas A and B 210
Mass Expulsion from Refugee Camps 212
Refugees on Their Own Land: Life after Expulsion 213
Repeated Displacement 215

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ELIMINATION PROJECT IN THE WEST BANK 217
Introduction 217
Apartheid: The Legal Test and Institutional Structure in the West Bank 219
Occupation, Annexation, and Settler Colonialism: The Legal and Territorial Structure of Apartheid in the West Bank 224
The Five Domains of Action in Israel's Elimination Project in the West Bank as Inhuman Acts under Apartheid 229
Impunity and Lack of Accountability as a Mechanism that Sustains the Regime 239

6. CONCLUSION 245

1. INTRODUCTION

At the time of this report's publication, a broad Israeli assault is underway in the West Bank, rapidly and systematically dismantling all the foundations of Palestinian existence. Since the formation of the current government at the end of 2022, and with even greater intensity since October 2023, Israel has dramatically escalated its assault on all areas of life for Palestinians in the West Bank. The ability to get to work, take children to school, attend university, receive medical care or municipal services, meet with family and acquaintances, cultivate one's land, go on vacation, or attend cultural events, along with hundreds of other ordinary activities that make up daily life, are all under constant Israeli attack and are sometimes denied altogether. Over and above all this looms a constant threat to life and bodily integrity. At any moment, Palestinians may be exposed to violence by soldiers or armed settler militias, arrested and imprisoned, subjected to abuse and humiliation, and sometimes even killed. As the report shows, this combined assault, which targets Palestinians both as individuals and as a collective, has turned the lives of some 3.5 million people into a constant reality of oppression and dispossession imposed by the Israeli regime.

Human rights documentation, and the public discourse surrounding it, tend to focus on individual incidents of concrete harm. This report takes a broader view. It examines the reality in the West Bank as a complex system with an underlying logic, implemented through different practices by a range of Israeli actors working at the same time and in coordination with one another. Viewed this way, Israel's actions in the West Bank are not simply a series of separate violations of individual and collective rights. Rather, they are part of a comprehensive mechanism of elimination. Here, elimination means the sustained undermining of the conditions that allow Palestinians to exist as an independent collective with land, institutions, language, culture, social ties, leadership, shared memory and history and a social and political horizon. Israel's project of elimination in the West Bank is reshaping the territory and the conditions of life within it so that Israeli control and presence become continuous, institutionalized, and permanent, while Palestinian existence becomes fragmented, vulnerable, and dependent.

This report shows how Israel is implementing this mechanism of elimination through five main domains: violence and intimidation, movement restrictions, economic strangulation, social and political destruction, and ethnic cleansing and territorial takeover.

These five domains operate at once and reinforce one another. Movement restrictions and economic strangulation damage livelihoods, social ties, and Palestinians' ability to sustain institutions and engage in political life. The resulting political and social harm weakens Palestinians' ability to defend their rights and maintain their ties to the territory and the land. Together, these processes facilitate the expansion of Israeli control over the West Bank and the displacement of Palestinians from it. Displacement tears communities apart and harms homes, agriculture, collective memory, and geographic continuity. Violence is the central means of coercion that makes the entire system possible and accelerates its operation.

The project of elimination is not limited to dismantling Palestinian life. It also involves Israel's ongoing, open, and explicit effort to deepen its control over the West Bank and reorganize it around continuous Israeli presence. This is not only a matter of physical territory. The Israeli regime is also increasingly claiming exclusive ownership of the historical, religious, and identity-based narratives that shape the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Israeli flags fill the West Bank, while Palestinian flags are repeatedly removed from public spaces. Israeli forces provide protection for organized pogroms by settlers while violently suppressing Palestinian protests. Settlement farms and outposts serve as tools for taking control of vast areas of land, while Palestinian farmers lose access to their fields and entire communities are uprooted. Together, these practices show how the Israeli regime is organizing the territory according to its core principle: Jewish supremacy.

To understand the reality now taking shape in the West Bank, it is necessary to examine the ideological roots and governing structures on which this Israeli mechanism of elimination rests. As this report shows, the Zionist-Israeli project has clear settler-colonial characteristics: it has pursued Jewish-Israeli sovereignty in a territory inhabited by an Indigenous Palestinian population through displacement, expulsion, dispossession, fragmentation, and the weakening of Palestinian existence.

Since its founding, the State of Israel has structured both the territory and the distribution of rights in ways that give Jews preference over Palestinians. This is the historical foundation of the apartheid regime described in this report. Defining the Zionist-Israeli project as bearing settler-colonial characteristics does not deny Jewish historical, religious, or cultural connection to this land; the longstanding presence of Jewish communities here; or the long history of persecution, displacement, and violence Jews have endured. The question is not whether there is a Jewish affiliation to the land, but how the Zionist-Israeli project has sought to establish exclusive Jewish-Israeli sovereignty in a land where Palestinians lived, and still live.

This history is essential to understanding the current phase of the project of elimination. This phase relies on mechanisms Israel has developed and used for decades. But since the formation of the current government at the end of 2022, and especially since October 2023, the use of those mechanisms has accelerated and intensified. In the Gaza Strip, the logic of elimination has taken its most extreme form: the genocide Israel is committing against Palestinians there. In the West Bank, it is taking a different form, through the five domains described in this report. The two arenas are not disconnected from one another. Since October 2023, Israel has pushed the boundaries of its violence in the West Bank, too. Practices that were rare there, and are associated with the war in Gaza, have become more common. These include airstrikes, broad destruction of residential areas and infrastructure, mass displacement, and significant easing of the open-fire policy.

The "Decisive Plan" published in 2017 by Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich is key to understanding the current reality in the West Bank. The document openly lays out the logic of elimination and links settler-colonial ideology to a political program. It presents Palestinians with three options: live under Jewish supremacy and abandon their national claims, leave, or face violent repression if they resist. In recent years, central elements of the "Decisive Plan", and of the logic underlying it, have been translated into policy, budgets, government powers and practices on the ground.

The Israeli practices described in this report also have clear legal implications. While "elimination" is not a discrete legal category, and international law does not define this undertaking as a single offense, it does identify and prohibit the project's various components. The report's legal analysis finds that Israel is using its military occupation of the West Bank as a central tool for maintaining an apartheid regime. It further finds that the inhuman acts committed under that regime, and in order to uphold it, meet the legal definition of apartheid, which is a crime against humanity. The policies and practices described in the report also involve other serious violations of international law, including violations of the prohibitions on annexation, settlement, deportation, and forcible transfer, as well as of Palestinians' right to self-determination.

B'Tselem has been documenting Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights and investigating the Israeli regime's mechanisms of control and repression for decades. In this capacity, it has continued since October 2023 to closely monitor developments in the West Bank and document the genocide in the Gaza Strip. The present report draws on this body of knowledge, including approximately 2,000 testimonies collected in recent years from

Palestinians in the West Bank; ongoing field documentation and research; the work of other organizations; and the analysis of official documents, legislation, government resolutions, and other data. It is grounded in the understanding that documenting each incident on its own, however essential that work may be, is not enough. The report connects the different violations, examines the logic that ties them together and the mechanisms that enable them, and presents an overall picture of the reality the Israeli regime is creating in the West Bank.

The report concludes that the current reality in the West Bank is neither a temporary crisis nor a collection of random human rights violations. It is an accelerated and explicit phase in an ongoing project of elimination that operates within the Israeli apartheid regime and is driven by a settler-colonial logic of dispossession, displacement, and the establishment of Jewish-Israeli sovereignty. Targeted measures may mitigate harm and provide short-term protection for certain individuals, and are therefore important. However, they do not change the underlying structure that generates the violence, dispossession, and oppression. Partial reforms or a return to a more "restrained" form of control cannot transform a system based from its inception on dispossession, plunder, and oppression into one that respects human rights.

The political and international implications are urgent. The international community is facing an apartheid regime that deploys mechanisms of elimination within a settler-colonial project, and is doing so in an ever-accelerating and intensifying manner. For decades, the international community has granted the Israeli regime de facto impunity. Rather than taking decisive action to stop Israel's crimes, as international law requires, it has largely made do with calling on Israel to "return to the political process," "use restraint," and "avoid unilateral measures." Political, diplomatic, military and economic support for Israel, together with the diplomatic protection it receives, provides the Israeli regime with the resources, legitimacy and freedom to continue committing crimes against Palestinians. The genocide in Gaza has not prompted the fundamental shift in international policy that the scale of the crimes requires. The same impunity also allows the violence, economic strangulation, social and political destruction and ethnic cleansing in the West Bank to continue.

Protecting Palestinians' human rights requires ending Israel's crimes and dismantling its apartheid regime. A future of freedom, justice, equality and democracy for all who live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea requires that the Palestinians' individual and collective rights be recognized. This includes their right to determine their own future and the establishment of a political order that is not based on supremacy, dispossession and elimination.

2. METHODOLOGY

This report examines the actions of the Israeli regime in the West Bank and its pursuit of the elimination of Palestinians as a collective, a process that has continued since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in June 1967 and intensified significantly since October 2023. Our analysis is grounded in the understanding that the violations of Palestinians' human rights documented over decades, including by B'Tselem, are neither isolated nor sporadic events, but rather form part of an integrated system governed by a coherent logic. The report systematically documents Palestinians' daily lives under prolonged Israeli control, recognizing that the violence employed by the Israeli regime cannot be understood solely through moments of extreme escalation, as the regime also works to gradually erode the conditions needed to sustain Palestinian life: through the cultivation of fear and persistent uncertainty about the future; the proliferation of checkpoints and movement restrictions; control over livelihoods; and other everyday measures that make life increasingly constrained and, at times, impossible.

Among the questions guiding the report are:

– How can we understand the overarching logic of the Israeli regime that has sustained systematic violation of rights and the abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank over decades?

– What characterizes the Israeli regime's actions in the West Bank since October 2023? What trends emerge, and what do they reveal about the current political moment?

– How do Israel's patterns of control and violence affect the ability of Palestinians in the West Bank to sustain themselves as individuals and as a collective?

These questions are explored across several dimensions: the scale and frequency of harm; the conduct of the military, police, Civil Administration, and armed settlers, and the degree of coordination among them; the impunity and institutional backing afforded to Israelis; and the cumulative effect of these practices on Palestinians' ability to sustain social, economic, and political life in the West Bank.

The methodology for this report combines field research with analysis of other publicly available sources, including surveys and journalistic and historical sources. B'Tselem field researchers who live in the West Bank systematically gather information on the ground among their own communities. They collect testimonies about Israeli acts of both physical and psychological violence, home demolitions, and the displacement of Palestinian communities. Whenever possible, they interview those directly affected, their relatives, and members of the community. They also investigate events and broader phenomena through structured, in-depth interviews and ongoing follow-up, while collecting quantitative data and visual documentation, including videos and photographs.

The research also analyzes how the various arms of the Israeli regime operate in coordination, including both official institutions and civilian actors acting under their auspices in the West Bank. This analysis draws on field observations and on Israeli political and public discourse as reflected in the media and on social media. It also relies on Hebrew-, Arabic-, and English-language journalism, reports by civil society organizations, and B'Tselem's internal databases.

Quantitative data presented here also draw on reports by aid and development organizations, including UN agencies, and local NGOs as well as on investigations by established media outlets that adhere to journalistic ethics and rigorous fact checking. It also relies on available official documents from Palestinian institutions, which provide figures on people killed or injured and on arrests, as well as data on damage to property and infrastructure, harm to agriculture, movement restrictions, and more. The report also uses official Israeli sources, including military orders, administrative decisions, and legal documents published by government, military, and administrative bodies.

By drawing on this range of sources and cross-checking them, the report situates individual cases within broader patterns of regime conduct. It examines human rights violations in several key categories: direct physical harm, including killings and severe violence; measures that constrain daily life, such as movement restrictions and economic strangulation; and policies that undermine Palestinian society, including social and political destruction, ethnic cleansing dispossession, and expulsion. Taken together, these practices form an integrated system of control, displacement, and elimination in the West Bank. The data serve both to document violations in their legal, political, and social dimensions and to illuminate the workings of the Israeli regime. Whether a testimony

concerns a road closure or demolition, violence against shepherds, the arrest of a minor, or killing of workers who crossed the Separation Barrier, the report examines it not only as an account of a particular event, but also for what it reveals about the wider system of control, strangulation, displacement, and elimination.

The fact that the organization's field researchers live within the communities in which they work and maintain ongoing relationships with them is another central component of the research methodology. This approach recognizes that those who live the difficult everyday reality of the West Bank possess knowledge essential to understanding it. The researchers' sustained familiarity with the communities enables them to understand local contexts, identify persistent patterns, and trace gradual changes on the ground over time. In this sense, the report relies both on gathering information about Palestinian communities in the West Bank and on producing knowledge through direct, ongoing engagement, which enables an understanding of the logic of the Israeli regime in the West Bank.

As a human rights organization, B'Tselem conducts this research out of a deep commitment to protecting human rights generally, and the rights of Palestinians living under Israeli control in particular.

This research is conducted amid military control, ongoing violence, fear, movement restrictions, and real danger to West Bank residents. Worsening conditions on the ground make it more difficult to collect information, reach the sites of incidents, document events, conduct interviews, and verify details in real time. These constraints arise directly from the reality the report describes and formed part of the conditions under which it was produced.

3. THE ELIMINATION PROJECT: POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Since the current Israeli government was formed at the end of 2022, and especially since October 2023, Israeli violence against Palestinians has intensified. The mechanisms Israel has used against Palestinians for decades have become more violent, more overt and almost entirely unrestrained. Today, the abuse focuses more directly on Palestinians' living conditions. Severe violence against civilians, expulsion, mass incarceration, torture, destruction and plunder have become widespread, explicit and normalized in Israeli public discourse. Moreover, practices that were once denied or presented as "lawful" and compliant with international law are increasingly presented by Israeli politicians and the Israeli media as tools of deterrence or revenge and, at times, even as successfully implemented policy.

In the West Bank, this escalation has created a reality in which millions of Palestinians live in constant fear of Israeli military and civilian violence. Palestinian communities are displaced in an accelerating process of ethnic cleansing, while an ever-expanding Israeli presence is being established in the form of settlements, outposts, farms and Israeli-only civilian infrastructure. The direct and persistent damage inflicted on people's lives, bodies, homes, livelihoods, family ties and ability to manage their own lives steadily dismantles the conditions that underpin Palestinians' capacity to exist as individuals, communities and a collective on their land.

Israeli apartheid is a system of government designed to advance Jewish supremacy throughout the territory under its control: it grants Israeli-Jews[1] full rights and continuous control over territory, land and political power, while dividing Palestinians into separate groups, denying them the ability to act as a unified political and social collective,

1. In this chapter, the term "Jews" refers to the ethnonational group to which the Israeli regime grants preferential status, rights and resources relative to Palestinians; it is not intended to refer to Judaism as a religion or to ascribe a political position or responsibility to every Jewish person. This category does not coincide with Israeli citizenship, nor does it fully coincide with the legal definition in the Law of Return. For its purposes, the law defines a "Jew" as a person born to a Jewish mother or who has converted to Judaism and is not a member of another religion, but it also grants rights of return and citizenship to the child and grandchild of a Jew and to their spouses. Basic Law: Israel – The Nation-State of the Jewish People provides that the exercise of the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.

dispossessing them of their land, subjecting them to discriminatory laws, and exposing them to harm and repeated attacks by Israeli military forces and armed settler militias.

The escalation of recent years lays bare a mode of reasoning central to Israel's treatment of Palestinians: the logic of elimination. In the West Bank, the focus of this report, this logic is now operating at an accelerated pace and with particular openness. Elimination in this context means the sustained undermining of the conditions that enable Palestinians to exist as a people with land, institutions, language, culture, social ties, leadership, shared memory, history and a social and political horizon. Elimination is not merely a collection of violent practices or separate policy measures. It is an ongoing political project that seeks to reorganize space and living conditions so that Israeli presence becomes continuous, institutionalized and permanent, while Palestinian existence is fragmented and rendered vulnerable and dependent.

Even amid this effort at elimination, Palestinians continue to maintain family and community life, preserve their attachment to the land, and struggle for their rights and future.

The logic of elimination is the basic logic of settler colonialism, which is a project that seeks to establish permanent settler sovereignty over a territory already inhabited by an Indigenous people. It achieves this by pushing them out, dispossessing them and dismantling their collective existence. In the Israeli case, apartheid is the form of rule through which the elimination project manages the Palestinians' continued presence in the territory, restrict the possibilities for Palestinian life and dismantles their power as a collective.

The events of October 2023 accelerated processes already underway within a regime that embodied the logic of elimination. In Gaza, this logic has taken on its most extreme form: the genocide Israel is committing against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, as B'Tselem analyzed in its July 2025 report, Our Genocide, including mass killing, destruction, displacement, starvation and sustained attacks on entire life-sustaining systems. The present report focuses on the reality of life in the West Bank today and examines it within the ongoing historical context of Israel's logic of elimination. Rather than discussing Israeli practices as unrelated measures, the report demonstrates that they are manifestations of a mechanism designed to dismantle the conditions required for collective Palestinian existence and establish in their place territorial continuity for Israelis and Israeli control.

Within this framework, the Decisive Plan, published by Bezalel Smotrich in 2017, when he was a member of the Knesset, is a key document for understanding Israeli action in the West Bank. Its significance rests in the way it openly, starkly and explicitly formulates the logic of elimination, linking settler-colonial ideology with a political action plan being implemented on the ground. This plan presents Palestinians with three options: to live under Jewish-Israeli supremacy while relinquishing their national claims, to leave, or to face violent suppression by the Israeli military. In recent years, central elements of this logic have been translated into policy, budgets, authorities and practices implemented by various arms of the state, including the military, the Civil Administration and settler movements. The Decisive Plan articulates the rationale underlying what is happening in the West Bank today: the expansion of Jewish sovereignty and Israeli control by means of plunder, dispossession, land takeover, community displacement and dismantling the possibility of Palestinian existence with a claim to self-determination. All of this is intended to entrench Israeli control and make it irreversible, while reducing the Palestinian presence as much as possible.

The Logic of Elimination within Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism is a political project that seeks to establish the permanent sovereignty of a settler population over a territory inhabited by an Indigenous collective. The existence of such a collective is a fundamental obstacle to the settler-colonial project: it lives there, is connected to the land, and often maintains a political claim to continue living there as a people. Settler-colonial projects work to reshape the space so that settler presence appears permanent, natural and legitimate, while Indigenous connection to the space is marginalized, denied and dismantled.

The term "logic of elimination" was coined by the Australian historian Patrick Wolfe. It describes how settler-colonial projects work to reduce, dismantle and remove Indigenous existence as a collective with a connection to the land. Elimination can manifest as efforts to reduce the Indigenous presence in the territory by various means, including killing, expulsion and confinement to smaller, fragmented areas. It can also operate over time through legal, planning, economic and spatial mechanisms such as preventing refugees from returning, dispossessing people of land, fragmenting communities, controlling movement and attacking social and political institutions. What these manifestations share is harm to the conditions a people needs in order to exist as a collective on its land.

Colonial elimination is realized through two complementary processes. One pushes the Indigenous people off the land, denies them their rights, destroys structures and institutions that express their permanent presence in the territory and strips them of political power.[2] The other, parallel process, establishes a new order designed to populate the land previously inhabited by the Indigenous people with settlers and preserve settler supremacy in the territory from which the Indigenous people have been pushed out. Building new settlements, establishing infrastructure, public institutions and legal systems, and writing and embedding a new history are all part of the process by which control becomes stable and taken for granted. They render the presence of settler society permanent and legitimate, while Indigenous existence is marked as temporary, foreign, threatening or marginal.

Another central dimension of elimination is the creation of "Indigenous absence." This entails reducing an Indigenous group to the status of a local population, a cultural community or a collection of individuals who can be administered, moved, divided or incorporated on terms set by the settler sovereign. To this end, settler-colonial projects often portray the Indigenous group as not being a "people," as a group with no unique connections to the land or as people who belong elsewhere. Members of the Indigenous group may continue to live and work there, and to be administered and governed. However, within the new order they are treated as an administrative or security problem rather than as a people with a shared past, a connection to the land and rights that follow from that connection. At the same time, the land is presented as terra nullius, a land belonging to no one, which the settlers may claim for themselves by virtue of settling and cultivating it. When the Indigenous group is not entirely removed from the territory, control and separation can serve as means of elimination because they make it possible to administer members of the group as separate populations, push them off the land, strip them of political power and dismantle their ability to act as a people.

2. In various historical cases, including North America, Australia and Tasmania, settler-colonial projects established settler sovereignty through violent implementation of the logic of elimination, which in many cases included genocide, mass killing, expulsion, confinement, severance from land, families, languages and life-sustaining systems, forced assimilation, and marginalization within the new state order. In these cases, the "success" of the settler-colonial project did not require the complete physical disappearance of every member of the Indigenous group. Rather, it took the form of establishing a new settler sovereignty, dismantling central parts of Indigenous life, and turning Indigenous peoples into subjugated minorities whose political authority and connection to the land were either unrecognized or only partially recognized.

In the Israeli case, the Zionist claim to sovereignty rested on historical, religious, and cultural ties to the land, on the ongoing existence of Jewish communities there, and on a long history of persecution, displacement and violence, primarily in Europe, that culminated in the Holocaust. Identifying the Zionist-Israeli project as a settler-colonial project does not deny the Jewish connection to the land, nor does it disregard that history. The central question regarding the Zionist-Israeli project as a settler-colonial project concerns neither the existence of a Jewish connection to the land nor the hardship and persecution suffered by Jewish communities elsewhere in the world, but the methods used by the political Zionist movement to establish exclusive Jewish-Israeli sovereignty over a territory where Palestinians lived and continue to live.

Historically, the Zionist claim was realized through organized immigration, which, from the First World War onward, was supported by Britain, the colonial power that ruled Palestine, and through the establishment of separate national institutions, the purchase and later seizure of land, the creation of a Jewish majority, the expulsion of Palestinians, the prevention of Palestinian return, the transfer of land to Zionist institutional control, the use of violence, including killing, and the fragmentation of Palestinians into different legal statuses and separate spaces. In this sense, the Zionist-Israeli project bears the hallmarks of settler colonialism – establishing settler sovereignty through the displacement, expulsion, dispossession, fragmentation and weakening of the Indigenous Palestinian population, and the elimination of its presence from the territory.

Manifestations of Elimination under the Israeli Regime

At its most extreme, the logic of elimination takes the form of killing, expulsion and widespread destruction. The Nakba, which began in 1947, and the genocide Israel is committing in the Gaza Strip are cases in point. Yet, manifestations of the elimination of Palestinians have been a constant feature throughout the history of the Zionist project and the Israeli regime. Elimination operates within a regime structure designed to establish and preserve Jewish supremacy. One of the fundamental mechanisms of this structure is the fragmentation of Palestinians into different legal and spatial groups: Palestinians who remained within the State of Israel after 1948 and received Israeli citizenship, residents of East Jerusalem, residents of the West Bank, residents of the Gaza Strip and Palestinian refugees in exile. This fragmentation allows Israel to administer each group

under different statuses, laws and rights, undermining Palestinians' ability to act as a single political collective. It also allows Israel to allocate land and resources and regulate movement, thus furthering Palestinian dispossession and displacement and expanding Israeli presence.

Palestinian Existence as an Obstacle to Jewish Sovereignty

The conditions that gave rise to the logic of elimination can be identified in the Zionist project even before the establishment of the State of Israel. Once the project sought to establish exclusive Jewish sovereignty over a territory inhabited by an Indigenous Palestinian population, the existence of Palestinians as a people with ties to the land and a political claim to the territory came to be viewed as a demographic, territorial, security and political obstacle: It was a demographic obstacle because establishing a Jewish state required a Jewish majority to maintain, among other things, its ethos as a "democracy"; it was a territorial obstacle because Palestinians lived on the land over which the Zionist project sought to establish sovereignty; it was a security obstacle because Palestinians were perceived as a constant threat to the Jewish population and a potential "fifth column" within the Jewish state; and it was a political obstacle because Palestinians held a claim to self-determination.[3]

The Zionist-Israeli project also responds to the problem posed by Palestinian existence by denying Palestinian indigeneity: denying Palestinians recognition as a people with a prior and unique connection to the land and rights that follow from that connection. In Zionist-Israeli discourse, Palestinians have repeatedly been portrayed as a population that is not a people, as a group with no prior right to the land or whose origins and proper place are in other Arab countries. Phrases such as "a land without a people for a people without a land," "there is no Palestinian people," and "they have other countries" function as political tools for portraying Palestinians as a population that can be moved, fragmented, administered or excluded from the political community. In this way, Israel works to eliminate recognition of Palestinians as an Indigenous people with rights, a shared history, a prior connection to the land and a legitimate claim to self-determination.

---

3. An early example of this understanding appears in "The Iron Wall", an essay by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, one of the leaders of Revisionist Zionism, published in 1923. The essay explicitly recognizes the tension between a settler project seeking to establish a new sovereignty and an Indigenous people with a connection to the land and a political claim to the territory. Jabotinsky acknowledged that the local population of the land would resist Jewish settlement, because any Indigenous population naturally resists being turned into a minority in its own country.

1948: The Nakba, Prevention of Return and Dispossession

The Nakba was the first instance in which the logic of elimination was implemented on a large scale. Between 1947 and 1949, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from or fled their homes. According to widely accepted estimates, about 750,000 people became refugees and were prevented from returning to their homeland. Hundreds of Palestinian communities were destroyed and depopulated; some were erased from the map. Entire areas shaped by generations of Palestinian life came under Israeli control, and a Jewish majority was established in a territory inhabited by an Indigenous Palestinian population.[4] Israel then worked to reshape the landscape so as to impede the refugees' return and obscure traces of the Palestinian presence that predated the establishment of the state: the state established Jewish communities on the lands of Palestinian villages, renamed places, planted forests, destroyed the remains of Palestinian communities, and brought the land under the control of state and Jewish institutions. Expulsion and prevention of return thus served not only to implement a demographic policy but also to reorganize the space itself.

The permanent and ongoing denial of Palestinian refugees' right to return to their homeland is one of the mechanisms through which Palestinian uprooting and displacement continue, rendering the Nakba an ongoing process of elimination. The 1950 Law of Return allows every Jew in the world to immigrate to Israel and obtain citizenship, while Palestinian refugees, many of whom were born and lived in the country until they were expelled or displaced, are not permitted to return. The dispossession and appropriation of refugee property were enshrined in the 1950 Absentees' Property Law, which transferred control over the property of refugees and displaced persons to the state or bodies acting on its behalf. The 1953 Land Acquisition Law, along with other laws and mechanisms, retroactively formalized the transfer of Palestinian land to Israeli control.

4. One of the first concrete expressions of the way Israel translated the logic of elimination into military action was Plan Dalet, approved by the Haganah in March 1948. The plan was formulated as a military document intended to enable control of the territory and prepare for military confrontation. It explicitly included possible courses of action against Palestinian villages and population centers: demolishing villages, setting them on fire, blowing them up and mining them, and, in the event of resistance, expelling the population beyond the borders of the intended state. The plan shows how expulsion and destruction were incorporated into the military operations surrounding 1948 and served as legitimate tools in the collective elimination of the Palestinian people.

This elimination also had narrative and institutional dimensions. In Israeli discourse, the 1948 war has been primarily described as the "War of Independence," a national story of state-building, survival and victory. According to this narrative, the expulsion, destruction and crimes committed against Palestinians are usually presented as byproducts of a war that could not be avoided, as consequences Palestinians brought upon themselves by opposing the United Nations' Partition Plan and the establishment of the Jewish state, or as the result of their flight, rather than as part of a broader process of expulsion, prevention of return and demographic engineering. In this way, the story of elimination itself is also erased: the Palestinian catastrophe is pushed out of the Israeli story, and the state's establishment is narrated in a way that obscures the role that Palestinian displacement, the prevention of return and the transfer of Palestinian land played in establishing the new state order based on Jewish supremacy.[5]

Within the 1948 Borders: Formal Citizenship, Control and Dispossession

Palestinians who remained within the borders of the Israeli state after 1948 were subjected to other mechanisms of elimination. Although they received Israeli citizenship, about 85% of them lived until 1966 under military rule that restricted movement, monitored political activity, suppressed protest and expropriated large tracts of land.

The land and planning policies that restricted Palestinian space within Israel also persisted after the military rule ended. The state established new Jewish-Israeli communities on land transferred to its control, while no new Palestinian communities were established, except for several communities designed to concentrate the Bedouin population in the Naqab/Negev on limited areas of land. Today, Palestinian local authorities and communities within Israel have jurisdiction over less than 3% of the state's total territory and are subject to severe planning and development restrictions. At the same time, these land and planning policies also take the form of large-scale home demolitions, especially in unrecognized Bedouin communities in the Naqab/Negev, and an ongoing threat to the existence of entire communities.

5. The erasure of the Nakba as a Palestinian narrative also took institutional and legal form in Amendment No. 40 to the Budget Foundations Law, known as the "Nakba Law," which allows funding to a state-supported body to be reduced if it marks the Israeli Independence Day as a day of mourning.

This policy was also accompanied by tight control over the education system for Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, including its curricula and content. The education system was used to shape a subordinate civic identity while marginalizing Palestinian history, culture, memory and heritage and obscuring the connection between Palestinians who remained inside Israel and the Palestinian people as a whole.

Where citizenship was granted, elimination did not disappear; it took other forms.

After 1967: Occupation, Settlement and Continued Fragmentation

The occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip led to the displacement of an additional 200,000-300,000 Palestinians from these territories. Between 1967 and 1994, Israel revoked the residency status of about 140,000 West Bank Palestinians. It did so by removing them from the population registry it controlled, thereby preventing them from returning home. The occupation dramatically expanded the territory under Israeli control and imposed direct military rule over millions of Palestinians, while denying them political rights. In East Jerusalem, which Israel unilaterally annexed, most Palestinian residents received residency status rather than citizenship. At the same time, throughout the West Bank, Israel began imposing movement restrictions and developing a permit system. This system transformed Palestinian freedom of movement from a basic right into something contingent on Israeli approval: it could be revoked, restricted or suspended.

The mechanisms applied in the territories occupied in 1967 did not emerge from nowhere; they drew on earlier experience of military control over a Palestinian population. The military rule imposed on Palestinians inside Israel until 1966 served as a model for monitoring and administering a population by imposing movement restrictions, enacting a permit system, applying political repression and other means. After 1967, some of these tools were transferred to the occupied territories, where they were expanded and refined within the framework of occupation and direct military rule over millions of Palestinians without political rights.

After 1967, alongside its military control of the occupied territories, Israel advanced a settlement logic expressed in the establishment of settlements, land expropriation and control over planning and construction in occupied territory. Unlike the settlement

pattern already employed within the state's borders, involving rapid, large-scale expulsion of the kind carried out in 1948, Israel established Israeli civilian presence in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the form of settlements, infrastructure, roads and institutions, as well as a military and security apparatus designed to protect that civilian presence and facilitate its expansion. Settlement was not only a result of the occupation; it was a tool for reshaping space, expanding Israeli contiguity, fragmenting Palestinian space, displacing communities and entrenching Israeli control in ways that make it harder to challenge. This created a single space under Israeli control, particularly in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in which Israeli settlers enjoy freedom of movement, are subject to Israeli civil law and have access to state-provided resources and services, while Palestinians living in the same space are subject to military rule and depend on permit systems to exercise their rights and freedom of movement.

For decades, Israel continued to promote the legal-spatial fragmentation of Palestinians described above. One example is the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order), first enacted in 2003 and repeatedly extended over the years. The law almost entirely restricts the ability of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip to obtain status in Israel on the basis of family ties to Israeli citizens or Jerusalem residents. In this way, the tearing apart of Palestinian families across different borders, rights and statuses has been perpetuated by law.

Oslo: Palestinian Administration without Sovereignty

The Oslo Accords of the 1990s deepened the fragmentation of Palestinians and gave it a new institutional and administrative form. The agreements were presented as a step in a process toward a permanent-status arrangement. Under these agreements, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established as a semi-autonomous Palestinian governing body. It received limited powers to administer some aspects of civilian life of certain segments of the Palestinian population, while Israel retained control over the basic components of life in the territory: borders, movement, security, population registry, land, planning, water and resources.

The result was partial Palestinian autonomy without genuine sovereignty or control over the conditions that enable independent political, territorial and economic existence; many

of the PA's powers were subordinate to Israel. The division of the West Bank into Areas A, B and C, intended as a temporary arrangement, became an almost permanent structure. It concentrated Palestinian administration in fragmented enclaves while leaving Israel extensive control over the territory between them. Ultimately, Israel retained military control over the entire West Bank and, in Area C, which makes up about 60% of the West Bank, administrative control, including over planning and construction, land and resources.

This structure enabled Israel to develop a system of roads and infrastructure connecting the settlements to one another and to Israel, blurring, for Jewish-Israelis, the distinction between the West Bank and the rest of the territory under Israeli control. It also deepened the fragmentation of the Palestinian population, separated communities and spheres of life, and reinforced the administration of the Palestinian population in enclaves. The Oslo Accords, which were supposed to remain in effect for five years until a permanent agreement was reached, became a key vehicle for preserving a contiguous Israeli space and consolidating Israeli control over it, while fragmenting Palestinians and administering the Palestinian population in enclaves.

Yet despite these mechanisms of elimination, Palestinian collective existence persists, as do Palestinian claims to rights, return, sovereignty and self-determination. Throughout all these periods, Palestinians continued to resist their fragmentation and displacement, insisting on their right to remain on their land and live there, maintain familial, social and political ties across separated spaces, build institutions, wage political struggles and demand recognition of their rights as a people.

Changing Forms, an Evolving System, One Logic

The Nakba, military rule, the appropriation of displaced persons' and refugees' properties, the expropriation of land, the military occupation and the settlements in the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, the Oslo Accords and the legal-spatial fragmentation are not discrete, isolated manifestations. Over the years, the tools used to advance the Israeli settler-colonial project and establish exclusive Jewish sovereignty over the territory have changed and multiplied, but the logic underlying their operation as state mechanisms has remained the same: establishing a contiguous space under Israeli control while pushing Palestinians off the land, denying them protection and the ability to exercise their rights,

and preventing them from acting as a political collective. It is against this historical background that one must understand the intensification of recent years and the way longstanding mechanisms of control, fragmentation and dispossession are now being applied more forcefully and openly.

Recent Years: Intensification, Acceleration and Exposure of Israel's Logic of Elimination

Since Israel's current government was formed at the end of 2022, and even more so since October 2023, Israel has entered a new phase in which the mechanisms of elimination are being applied at an accelerated pace and more openly than ever. The mechanisms described above are being used more intensively, with closer coordination and cooperation between arms of the state and far-right settler actors, and with broader public and political legitimacy. Violence that was once presented as temporary, a security necessity or a departure from policy is now presented as an integral part of the regime's mechanism of control.

The assault on the conditions underpinning Palestinian life has become direct, systematic and unrestrained. The elimination of Palestinian existence as a political, social and territorial collective is carried out through daily harm to individuals, families and communities, enabled by the profound dehumanization of Palestinians. The various forms of violence directed at Palestinians undermine their ability to maintain the most basic elements of daily life: to have a home, earn a living, move around, study, care for their children, maintain family and community ties, and live without being left exposed and defenseless in the face of violence that can erupt at any moment.

The logic of elimination has been given explicit expression in Israeli legislation, policy and political language. For example, the 2018 Nation-State Law established that the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel is exclusive to the Jewish people, giving quasi-constitutional expression to the Jewish supremacy that already underpinned the regime. The guiding principles of the current government explicitly stated this logic, declaring that "the Jewish people have an exclusive and indisputable right to all parts of the Land of Israel."

Institutional Changes in Centers of Authority and Mechanisms of Power

When the current government was formed at the end of 2022, its guiding principles and coalition agreements enshrined an explicit agenda of expanding settlements, legalizing outposts and deepening Israeli control over the West Bank, and translated that agenda into a restructuring of the mechanisms of control. The guiding principles stated that the Jewish people have an exclusive right to all parts of the Land of Israel, and the coalition agreements translated this principle into concrete changes in the structure of government: powers were transferred from the military commander to the political echelon, chains of command and appointment mechanisms were revised, an independent governmental mechanism for the promotion of settlements was established, the independence of legal advisers was weakened, and the possibility of selectively applying Israeli legislation to settlers in the West Bank was expanded. The political agenda was thus transformed into ongoing institutional activity to promote settlements, legalize outposts and deepen Israeli control over the territory.

The government entrusted these mechanisms to figures from the religious settler right, foremost Bezalel Smotrich, Itamar Ben Gvir and Orit Strock. Smotrich was appointed an additional minister in the Ministry of Defense and given broad powers over civilian matters in the West Bank, including planning, construction, enforcement, land and the legalization of outposts. As part of this arrangement, the Settlement Administration was established within the Ministry of Defense to centralize matters relating to Israeli civilian activity in the West Bank. At the same time, the Ministry of Settlement and National Missions, headed by Strock, was given a central role in channeling budgets and resources to settlements, outposts and farms, while Ben Gvir was given control over key coercive institutions, including the police and the prison system.

This development is part of the overt civilianization of Israeli control over the West Bank. This does not mean that the military system that previously administered the West Bank was neutral or separate from the settlement project; it served that project for decades. What is now different is that part of the military, security and legal veneer, through which control was presented as a temporary military situation rather than the permanent exercise of Israeli sovereignty, has been removed. Areas of operation that were formally administered by the military system have now been transferred to a civilian-governmental framework led by settlers and their representatives, and are openly used to expand settlements, advance the de facto annexation of territory and push Palestinians out.

October 2023 as a Point of Acceleration

On 7 October 2023, Hamas and other armed Palestinian organizations carried out the deadliest attack ever perpetrated against Israeli civilians. It was a criminal attack of unprecedented intensity, primarily directed at civilians and involving mass killing, severe violence, sexual violence, the abduction of civilians and other extremely grave crimes. A total of 1,218 people were killed as a result of the attack in areas near the Gaza Strip (the "Gaza envelope") or while being held captive. Of those killed, 882 were civilians and members of local security squads. The civilians killed included 280 women and 40 children. A total of 252 people, most of them alive and others dead, were abducted to the Gaza Strip, the overwhelming majority of them civilians, including women, elderly people and children. Over the following years, the living hostages and the bodies of hostages were returned to Israel, some after being held captive for many months and, in some cases, for more than two years. The acts committed on 7 October are war crimes and likely also crimes against humanity. The 7 October attack and its consequences deeply shook Israeli society and marked a point of acceleration within a system that already carried the logic of elimination.

The trauma, fear and desire for revenge experienced by the Israeli public were exploited and amplified by far-right figures in key positions in the Israeli government, who had already openly advanced a vision of escalating violence, displacement and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. The collective trauma, and the political exploitation of both that trauma and the desire for revenge among the Israeli public, created conditions in which broad segments of the Israeli public came to see large-scale violence against Palestinians as a legitimate, necessary and even desirable response.

Public and political discourse expanded the category of the enemy to encompass the entire Palestinian collective. The security discourse was pivotal. It portrayed Palestinian existence itself–including presence in the territory, political organization, resistance, movement, construction, education or the preservation of memory - as a threat to the security of the Jewish public in Israel. As such, actions expressing Palestinians' individual, social and political existence were repeatedly cast in terms of danger, incitement or terrorism. Security discourse not only justified violence; by recasting Palestinian rights, lives and presence as security threats, it became part of the mechanism of elimination itself.

In a similar vein, the Israeli response in Gaza, which developed into genocide, was not confined to those who committed the crimes or to the armed organizations. Rather, it was presented from the outset as an offensive directed at inflicting extensive harm on the Palestinian collective in Gaza and the conditions of life there. The mass killing, including the mass killing of children, destruction, displacement, starvation and assault on entire life-sustaining systems in Gaza received broad public justification. This shift reverberated in the West Bank and throughout all areas under Israeli control: it deepened the dehumanization of Palestinians, expanded the range of actions perceived as legitimate, and provided more overt backing for violence, displacement and dismantling.

One reason for this was that, in mainstream discourse among the Jewish public in Israel, the 7 October attack was generally interpreted as an event detached from the history that preceded it, as though it had occurred after Israel removed its settlements and "left Gaza" in 2005, rather than within an ongoing relationship in which Israel continued to control key aspects of Palestinian life in the Strip, keep its residents under blockade since 2007, and subject them to repeated military violence. The context of ongoing control, closure, repression and violence was thus erased from the Israeli public's consciousness. None of this can justify the grave crimes committed on 7 October, but this context is essential for understanding the circumstances in which those crimes occurred.

In the West Bank, the escalation of violence against Palestinians is reflected in the increasingly close relationship between the military, state institutions and settlers. Settler violence no longer operates merely as private violence or a breach of public order, but as part of a broader system of control: it is sometimes carried out alongside soldiers, with the backing of security forces, while using weapons, equipment and infrastructure supplied by the state, and with almost complete impunity. Thus, the boundary between military violence, state violence and civilian settler violence is blurred. Settler militias, agricultural farms and outposts, settlement security squads, regional defense units (Hagmar) and other armed settler groups operate as a mechanism of settler-colonial power intended to push Palestinians out: they intimidate residents, restrict movement and access to land, and accelerate the expulsion of Palestinian communities.

Stripping Away the Veneer of Legality and the Shift to Open Justification of Violence

Over the years, Israel employed legal, bureaucratic and public mechanisms, which were presented as checks on the use of force against Palestinians and, to a limited extent, also functioned that way. These mechanisms included the military and civilian justice systems, legal advisers, the Supreme Court, internal reviews and investigations, an official discourse of compliance with international law, and sensitivity to public and media criticism and to international pressure from Western states and international institutions.

These mechanisms did not prevent Israel from operating the apartheid regime and the occupation, expanding settlements and systematically violating Palestinian rights, but their very existence required Israel, at least officially, to engage with the law, evidence, procedures, investigations and limits on the use of force. Even when this engagement was used to justify the violence or cover it up, it created a need for explanation, denial, review, or for presenting an action as exceptional, temporary, proportionate or necessary. In some cases, it even imposed practical constraints on state action. At the same time, elements of the "rule of law" gave state violence an appearance of legality, professionalism and restraint, thereby helping legitimize it publicly, legally and internationally.

In recent years, and especially since October 2023, even this veneer has eroded. In domestic political and public discourse, Israel is rarely required to present its actions as though they comply with international law. Legal considerations are pushed aside and presented as marginal or irrelevant; legal and public criticism is branded as treason; internal investigations, even when they take place, are portrayed as the persecution of soldiers; and international institutions are described as antisemitic or illegitimate. Actions that once required denial, explanation or legal justification are now presented as legitimate policy. One of the clearest expressions of this shift is the almost total impunity enjoyed by Israelis who harm Palestinians. Soldiers, police officers and settlers who harmed Palestinians have for years enjoyed broad impunity from investigation and prosecution, but in recent years this impunity has expanded further and become overt and explicit. It is reflected in the absence of punishment after the fact, backing in advance, and a broad institutional and public understanding that harming Palestinians

will carry no cost and may sometimes even be rewarded.[6]

A similar process is evident in Israel's approach to international law. Israel has been violating international law in the occupied territories for years. However, these violations have expanded in recent years and have been accompanied by a more overt rejection of the rules and institutions intended to constrain the use of force against Palestinians, attacks on international institutions, and rejection of the basic idea of protecting human beings under international law.[7]

In prisons, this radicalization is expressed in turning total control over Palestinian bodies into an arena of violence, humiliation and torture. For decades, the prison system served as a mechanism of political repression and social dismantling through which Israel criminalized Palestinian resistance, political activity and social organization. Since Ben Gvir was appointed minister of National Security, in charge of the prison system in January 2023, and even more so since October 2023, the prison system has become one of the most extreme sites of violence and abuse against Palestinians, with routine physical and psychological violence, starvation, denial of medical treatment, sexual abuse, humiliation, torture and death. Ben Gvir and others exploited the public mood and embedded a logic of revenge in the prison system. The abuse of Palestinian prisoners and detainees became declared policy, with almost no attempts by the Israeli public, legal system or media to restrain it. The labeling of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli public discourse as Hamas armed forces or "Nukhbas" – sometimes indiscriminately and regardless of their legal status, their actions or the circumstances of their incarceration – further contributed to their dehumanization and helped justify the harm inflicted on them. The

6. The Force 100 affair, in which soldiers were accused of seriously abusing a Palestinian detainee at Sde Teiman, was recast in political discourse as a story about "heroic soldiers" persecuted by the military justice system; the indictment in the case was withdrawn, and after it was withdrawn, the prime minister called the affair a "blood libel" and said that "the State of Israel must pursue its enemies, not its heroic soldiers." Another example is the selection of Rabbi Avraham Zarviv to light a torch on Independence Day after he became known for operating a D9 bulldozer in Gaza, documenting the destruction of buildings and calling to "flatten Gaza."

7. The International Court of Justice ordered Israel in January 2024, and again in March 2024, to take immediate and effective measures to ensure the entry of humanitarian aid and basic services into Gaza at the required scale. In November 2024, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant , his former Minister of Defense. Senior Israeli officials portrayed these proceedings as illegitimate, political or antisemitic, and Israeli policy did not change materially. This position is not merely a legal disagreement, but part of a broader structure in which Israel seeks to operate without meaningful external constraints on its use of force against Palestinians.

fact that incarcerated Palestinians are under complete state control exposes the depth of their dehumanization: even when they are entirely dependent on the state, they are not regarded as human beings whose rights the state is obligated to protect, but as enemies whom it is permissible and even desirable to harm.

In this reality, Smotrich's Decisive Plan takes on particular importance. It is one of the clearest formulations of the logic of elimination and lays out the connection between settler-colonial ideology, policy and action on the ground.

The Decisive Plan: An Ideological and Operational Framework for Implementing the Logic of Elimination

The Decisive Plan is formally associated with Bezalel Smotrich, who published it in 2017 in the journal Hashiloach , associated with the Israeli religious right. The plan's premise is that in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, there is room for only one legitimate national claim, the Zionist claim to full Jewish sovereignty. It therefore seeks to eliminate the possibility of Palestinians existing as a political actor with a national claim to the territory.

In Hebrew, the term hakhra'ah, used in the plan's title, denotes the unilateral and definitive resolution of a contested matter. Here, it refers to an aspiration to end the Palestinian political claim unilaterally by breaking Palestinians' ability to continue existing as a political force. It employs a language of coercion, absolute victory, elimination of the possibility of resistance and foreclosing the defeated side's political future. In this sense, the Decisive Plan reflects a desire to defeat Palestinians as a political collective.

The plan, which represents a broad ideological current within the Israeli settler right, advances the imposition of exclusive Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank through annexation of the territory to Israel, "encouraging emigration" and violent repression of Palestinian resistance. In its premise and the practical measures it proposes, the plan is one of the clearest operational political expressions of the logic of elimination. Although it has not been formally adopted by the government, central elements of its logic have in recent years been translated into policy, budget allocations and practices implemented on the ground.

Analysis of the Decisive Plan

A. The Regime Structure Underlying the Plan: Apartheid as a Mechanism of Political Elimination

The plan is openly based on an ideology of ethnonational hierarchy. It seeks to establish a regime in which Jews hold full sovereignty and the power to determine the conditions of life throughout the entire territory by controlling land and resources, movement and crossings, and the institutional use of force.

The plan distinguishes between limited individual rights, on the one hand, and political and national rights, on the other. It presents the denial of collective rights as an arrangement that would grant Palestinians certain rights if they remain in the territory. In practice, these rights are conditional on subordination to Israeli sovereignty. They would be allowed to live under Israeli rule, but without the right to vote or choose the government that controls their lives, without any real ability to influence the distribution of resources, and without the possibility of shaping their collective political future and, therefore, their individual futures. They are thus denied political status and any claim to sovereignty, representation, self-determination or a future as a collective.

This is the formal structure of apartheid: one group exercises full sovereign control over the territory, while another group is not recognized as a political collective and is granted partial and conditional rights. The plan thus demonstrates the connection between apartheid and elimination: Palestinians may remain in the territory, but only in a subordinate and dependent status, without political equality or a role in shaping the government that determines their lives.

B. The Central Tool: "Victory through Settlement," Dispossession, Plunder and Settlement

At the heart of the plan is the view that the Palestinian claim to independence and self-determination is to be defeated only by changing the reality on the ground. In this framework, the establishment of settlements is not merely the realization of an Israeli right to settle in the territory, but a political tool intended to make Jewish sovereignty a permanent

and irreversible fact. According to the plan, the more expansive and institutionalized Jewish presence in the West Bank becomes, through the expansion of settlements and the development of infrastructure, roads and institutions, the more the possibility of a contiguous, independent Palestinian existence with a political future will disappear.

This is a clear expression of the logic of settler colonialism: elimination takes place not only through destruction, expulsion or direct violence but also through planning, construction, resource allocation and the reshaping of space. According to this logic, the takeover of land and the expansion of settlements are not byproducts of Israeli control, but essential tools for achieving this victory.

C. The Options the Plan Gives Palestinians: Political Elimination, Departure or Violent Repression

The plan presents Palestinians with three options, each embodying a different form of elimination. These options concern not only Palestinians' political status as a people; they also determine what will be done to them as individuals: the conditions under which they will be allowed to remain in their homeland, whether they will be pushed to leave, and what sort of violence will be used against them if they resist.

The first option is to remain in the territory. This is conditional on accepting political elimination, meaning the abandonment of Palestinian national claims. They would be able to administer some aspects of their daily lives through regional or municipal administrations but not as a people. The plan explicitly refers to administrations "lacking national characteristics" and explains that such a division into separate administrations would dismantle the Palestinian national collective. In other words, remaining in the territory is conditional on accepting Jewish supremacy as the governing principle organizing life between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Palestinians are required not only to relinquish their national claims, but to accept a subordinate and dependent status within a regime in which political power, land, resources and control over the use of force are held exclusively by Israelis.

The second option is to leave the territory. For those who will not give up their national aspirations, the plan proposes to "emigrate" and offers financial and logistical assistance

to that end. Yet, under a regime of control, dispossession, displacement and the absence of a political future, such "emigration" is not a free choice. Rather, it is the foreseeable result of Palestinian life in the territory being made impossible and devoid of a future. In practice, it constitutes a mechanism of forcible transfer or expulsion.

The third option is the use of force. Those who refuse to accept the outcome Israel seeks to impose and continue a violent struggle, or those who are defined as violently subverting Israeli rule, will be designated enemies whom the Israeli military must suppress by force. The plan calls this "military victory" and states that it is necessary to "kill those who need to be killed" and collect weapons "to the last bullet." Thus, alongside denying Palestinians the possibility of acting as a political collective, the plan promotes the ongoing use of force against those who do not accept the outcome Israel seeks to impose and struggle against it, in the name of security and counterterrorism.

The plan's three options outline its mode of action toward Palestinians as subjects under Israeli rule: remaining under conditions of political elimination, leaving the homeland, or, if they continue to resist, being defeated by force. All three lead to the same end: eliminating the Palestinian claim to sovereignty, self-determination and a shared Palestinian political future in the territory.

Implementing Elements of the Plan in Policy and on the Ground

The Decisive Plan has not been adopted in full as a government decision or enacted as law. Yet, as described above, since the government was formed at the end of 2022, figures identified with this conception have held key positions of power in the system of control over the West Bank. Powers previously exercised through the military apparatus were entrusted to Smotrich, in his role as minister in the Ministry of Defense responsible for the Settlement Administration, and to members of his Religious Zionism party.

These moves implement the element the plan calls "victory through settlement": the creation of a spatial reality in which Jewish-Israeli sovereignty becomes permanent, more overt and harder to challenge. On the ground, the same logic is also being implemented rapidly through means more flexible than formal political and planning procedures, including the establishment of outposts and farms, road construction and infrastructure development for settlements.

Violence presented in Israel as "settler violence" operates as part of the same system: it makes Palestinian life impossible in certain areas, accelerates the displacement of communities, and advances the outcome the plan formulates in political terms.

This is also evident in stepped-up enforcement against Palestinian construction and the demolition of homes and infrastructure. These measures advance the logic of the Decisive Plan: de facto annexation, pushing Palestinians out, creating Israeli territorial contiguity, and dismantling the possibility of an independent, organized Palestinian existence with a political future in the West Bank. The same logic operates in East Jerusalem through annexation already enshrined in Israeli law and distinct mechanisms of planning, construction, residency and spatial displacement.[8]

We now turn to examine how the logic formulated in the plan is realized through the principal domains of Israeli action in the West Bank, the focus of this report.

The Mechanism of Elimination in the West Bank

Israel's elimination project in the West Bank operates under the apartheid regime through an integrated system of five domains of action: violence and intimidation, movement restrictions, economic strangulation, social and political destruction, and ethnic cleansing and territorial takeover. Distinguishing between these domains helps clarify how they operate, but on the ground they are interwoven into a single mechanism that constitutes the local and contemporary manifestation of Israel's project of control, displacement and elimination: the mechanism of elimination in the West Bank. This is not a series of separate human rights violations, but a governing system that generates them. The five domains operate simultaneously and reinforce one another. Together, they restrict the ability to maintain the basics of daily life - moving safely, living in a home, earning a livelihood, maintaining family and community life, studying, receiving medical care and maintaining a connection to the land - and undermine the conditions that enable Palestinian society to exist as a political, social and territorial body with institutions, collective rights and a shared future.

8. In this report, East Jerusalem is discussed as part of the fragmented Palestinian space under Israeli control, but the analysis focuses on the mechanism of elimination currently operating in the West Bank.

The chapter "The Elimination Mechanism in the West Bank" in this report details the concrete manifestations of each axis, the data showing their intensification, and the ways they operate together. Here, they are presented within an organizing framework as a single mechanism of action with a common guiding logic and purpose.

Violence and Intimidation

Violence in the West Bank functions as a central mechanism of control, displacement and dismantling. Its effects are not confined to those directly impacted – killed, injured, imprisoned, beaten or expelled from their homes – but apply to a much broader population through intimidation. It narrows the range of actions available to all Palestinians in the West Bank and shapes individuals', families' and communities' daily decisions. In this sense, fear is not a byproduct of the violence but part of how it operates as a means of coercion.

The violence is inflicted by various arms of the state – the Israeli military, its reservists, regional defense units, the police and the Shin Bet – alongside settlement security coordinators, settlement security squads and settler militias. Some operate as official arms of the state; others are Israeli civilians operating with state support or protection, or within a sphere of almost complete impunity. They often function as part of a single system. Armed settler militias attack villages, shepherding communities, farmland and grazing areas every day using weapons they received from the state; the military is present but does not prevent the violence and even actively participates in it: it blocks access roads, fires tear gas or live ammunition at Palestinians who try to defend themselves or repel an attack. Notably, soldiers who live in settlements routinely take part in this routine violence directed at nearby Palestinian communities.

Israel presents much of its official military violence as a security response to attacks, threats or violent resistance by Palestinians and Palestinian armed organizations. In practice, however, military violence in the West Bank extends far beyond harm to those carrying out violent acts or affiliated with armed groups. It affects Palestinian society as a whole and the conditions of life: homes, roads, refugee camps, farmlands, grazing areas, public institutions, hospitals, schools, universities and workplaces.

This violence produces intimidation and deliberately creates, among other things, constant uncertainty. At any moment, soldiers may break into a home, settlers may arrive

at a grazing area, a checkpoint may close without explanation, gunfire may erupt in an ambush or raid, a child may be detained, a person may be arrested or beaten, a home, a road or a piece of infrastructure may be demolished, or access to medical care, work or school may be blocked. Under such conditions, every routine act requires a calculation of risk.

Since October 2023, patterns of action used in Gaza have also spread to the West Bank: broader use of lethal force, airstrikes, destruction of infrastructure in refugee camps, incursions into densely populated areas, attacks on medical teams and civilian spaces, and systematic incarceration and abuse.

Violence in the West Bank reflects the logic of colonial violence in general and of settler-colonial projects in particular. Such violence is inflicted on individuals, but its impact is extensive: it shapes the behavior of the subjugated population, breaks resistance, cultivates fear, pushes communities out of the areas where they live, and repeatedly makes clear who holds power. This is why even seemingly isolated practices, such as displays of military presence, home invasions, arbitrary detentions, searches, threats, humiliations, the use of tear gas and the denial of access to land, create a routine in which Palestinians have no safe space.

Palestinians resist Israeli control in many ways: documentation, legal action, political activity, protest, rebuilding, community organization, and armed resistance. Alongside these, Palestinian sumud (meaning steadfastness, holding to the land), is a political notion conceptualizing the remaining, continuity and rootedness of Palestinians, despite the ongoing efforts at displacing and dispossessing them. Sumud is expressed through a wide range of practices in everyday life and in collective actions. In recent years, and especially since October 2023, the space for Palestinian resistance has been subjected to growing repression and pressure, while Israeli violence has expanded and intensified. Israel, for its part, repeatedly turns Palestinian resistance itself – or the possibility that such resistance might develop – into a justification for expanding violence against neighborhoods, refugee camps, villages, communities, families and civilian spaces. Sometimes this comes in response to a violent act against Israelis or to a claim of a security threat; at other times, Israeli violence is used preemptively, on the basis of suspicion, for deterrence, punishment or "creating friction," or on the basis of claims for which no evidence is publicly available. Thus, Israel turns Palestinian resistance into grounds for broad harm to the conditions of life of Palestinians as a collective, even when that resistance is limited or local, and even when it is entirely nonviolent.

Movement Restrictions

The ability to move through space is a precondition for social, economic, familial and political life. When a person cannot reach their land, a hospital, work, school or the nearest city, land ownership or the existence of social institutions and services lose some of their practical significance.

Israel's system of control over Palestinian movement rests on longstanding infrastructure: the revocation in the early 1990s of the general entry permit that had allowed Palestinians to enter Israel and East Jerusalem since 1967, the general closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the division of the West Bank into Areas A, B and C, and the Separation Barrier, parts of which run deep inside the West Bank. Built on this infrastructure are checkpoints between the West Bank and Israel, East Jerusalem and Jordan; internal checkpoints within the West Bank; bypass roads; roads prohibited or restricted to Palestinian traffic; a permit system; military orders; and various types of physical obstructions, including gates, earth mounds, concrete blocks, spike strips, military jeeps and flying checkpoints. Together, these various devices and measures have created a fragmented and discontinuous Palestinian space, in which Palestinian movement depends on permits and on decisions by soldiers, officials, and sometimes also by Israeli civilians living in settlements and outposts.

In recent years and increasingly since October 2023, Israel has used this infrastructure in a more intensive, arbitrary and violent manner. Entry permits to Israel have been revoked or suspended, entrances to villages and towns have been closed, new roadblocks have been installed, internal checkpoints have multiplied, gates open and close without advance notice, and daily movement has become even more difficult, slow and unpredictable than before. Often, it is even impossible to know whether an obstruction was placed pursuant to an order, a military decision, an initiative by soldiers on the ground, settler demands, or an initiative by settlers themselves.

Control is thus exercised by maintaining and intensifying a sense of uncertainty. Palestinians who want to leave home do not know how long the journey will take, which route they will have to use, whether they will reach their destination and whether they will be able to return. The uncertainty disrupts Palestinians' ability to plan their lives and daily routines, including a workday, medical treatment, studies, a family visit, harvesting crops, reaching a plot of land or taking part in political activity. In this way, movement

restrictions become a broad mechanism of control over the time, space and the possibilities for life of an entire society.

Control over movement operates in two complementary directions. On the one hand, it breaks Palestinian space into enclaves and isolates communities that depend on entrances, gates, permits and alternative roads. At the same time, it produces Israeli territorial contiguity through roads, infrastructure, access to settlements and separation between the routes used by Israelis and Palestinians. In this way, restrictions on Palestinian movement become a tool for producing a different political space in which Israeli presence becomes more contiguous and accessible, while Palestinian presence becomes fragmented, conditional and vulnerable.

Movement restrictions are directly linked to dispossession. When farmers cannot reach their land, shepherds cannot reach grazing areas, workers cannot reach their workplaces, and students, teachers or medical teams cannot reach their destinations, movement restrictions also harm livelihoods, health, education, social ties and the ability to remain on the land. Often, denial of access to land or grazing, whether through military orders, roadblocks or settler violence, creates conditions for an Israeli takeover of that land. A blocked road or closed gate is therefore not merely a movement restriction; it becomes a means of dispossession.

The involvement of settler militias deepens the harm. Roadblocks, threats against drivers, attacks on roads, unauthorized obstructions, demands and pressure that the military close Palestinian traffic routes, and preventing Palestinians from traveling on roads all render movement restrictions another arena in which the distinction between the state and the settler population is blurred. Settlers and settler militias are not external to the system of movement restrictions, but part of the mechanism of control and elimination.

Economic Strangulation

The economic strangulation of Palestinians in the West Bank harms the material conditions that allow them to earn a living, maintain a home, cultivate land, move around, study, receive medical treatment and plan for the future. It is manifested in poverty, unemployment and a significant decline in living standards. But it also functions as a mechanism of control

and sustained pressure, increasing Palestinian society's dependence on Israeli rule. Israel's control over sources of livelihood, movement, crossings, land, water, planning and infrastructure, as well as its control over the Palestinian Authority's budget through the tax revenues it collects on the Palestinian Authority's behalf, makes Palestinian life less stable, less secure and less sustainable.

Economic strangulation in the West Bank rests on a dependence built over decades. Since 1967, Israel has restricted independent Palestinian economic development, channeled the Palestinian labor force into the Israeli labor market, controlled resources and crossings, and prevented independent development of infrastructure, industry, agriculture and trade. The Oslo Accords and the Paris Protocol did not dismantle this dependence, but helped entrench it. Israel retained control over crossings, the trade system, currency and the Palestinian Authority's tax revenues.

In recent years, Israel has increasingly used this dependence as a mechanism of strangulation. It revoked or suspended almost all work permits held by Palestinians for employment in Israel, cutting tens of thousands of Palestinian workers and their families off from a major source of income. At the same time, it intensified delays and deductions from the Palestinian Authority's tax revenues and impaired its ability to pay salaries and provide basic services; Israel also threatened to sever the Palestinian banking system from Israeli banks, through which it is also connected to the international banking system. Israel has thereby turned the Palestinian economy's financial dependence into another tool of sustained pressure.

Economic harm is also inflicted by the other arms of the mechanism of elimination. Thus, for example, movement restrictions, the permit system, military orders and roadblocks prevent people from reaching workplaces and markets, traveling abroad through Allenby Bridge, reaching farmland and accessing public services. The takeover of space prevents Palestinian development and expands Israeli industrial zones. Violence by the military and settler militias prevents access to farmland and grazing areas. Control over water, energy and infrastructure undermines the ability to maintain agriculture, industry and daily life.

The harm to agriculture and herding illustrates this well. For many families in the West Bank, farmland, olive trees, vineyards, greenhouses and flocks are not only a source of income but also an economic safety net, embodying an intergenerational connection to

the land and providing a foundation for community life. When farmers cannot reach their land, olive trees are cut down, greenhouses are demolished, shepherds are driven away from grazing areas and water sources, and flocks are stolen, this directly harms income, food, property and the ability to sustain a household. The damage, however, runs deeper: an economic safety net is lost; the transfer of agricultural knowledge down through generations is interrupted; people are severed from their land and their ability to continue living there is diminished. Destroying an olive grove, a greenhouse or a herd does not affect just one agricultural season; it can destroy the foundations of a way of life built over generations, and rebuilding those foundations requires time, money and conditions that do not exist amid violence, movement restrictions and dispossession.

Economic strangulation extends from households to the institutions and services that sustain society. When families cannot pay rent, buy food, repay debts, cultivate land or send their children to school, their ability to sustain the basics of daily life is undermined. When the Palestinian Authority cannot pay teachers, doctors, officials and service workers their full salaries, when the education system shifts to partial or remote learning, when the healthcare system operates amid shortages of funding, equipment and medication and access to medical care is severely impaired, Palestinian society's ability to maintain institutional continuity and community resilience, and preserve prospects for the next generation is reduced.

Economic strangulation produces dependence and vulnerability. It leaves families, communities and institutions facing forced choices: remain without a livelihood, move elsewhere, sell assets, give up education, reduce their herds, abandon land or rely on external aid. Although relinquishing land, leaving, and dismantling forms of life, livelihood and community result from sustained structural economic pressure, they are almost never presented as expulsion. In this way, economic strangulation gives material form to the logic of elimination: remaining means living in dependence and vulnerability, without prospects, while leaving may become the only remaining option.

Social and Political Destruction

Israel attacks the infrastructure that enables Palestinian society to exist as a social and political body. It undermines the conditions needed to sustain institutions, leadership, shared memory and narrative, culture, education, journalism, spaces for organizing and a political horizon.

Palestinian residents of the West Bank live as subjects without citizenship under a system that determines most aspects of their lives without giving them the ability to participate in the decisions that shape those lives. Israel determines their basic living conditions and defines the limits of what it considers legitimate expressions of Palestinian national identity and political activity. Political, community, professional, cultural and educational organizing is one of the main ways Palestinian society seeks to preserve a capacity for collective action, which is why Israel regards such organizing as a threat.

Since 1967, Israel has employed a series of emergency regulations and military orders to criminalize nearly every form of Palestinian political activity. Israeli legislation and declarations made under it, including the Counter-Terrorism Law, have expanded this framework of criminalization and allowed Israel to portray political parties, youth movements, popular committees, civil society organizations, student groups, journalists, social activists and human rights defenders as "agents of incitement," "terrorist actors," or participants in "unlawful associations." In doing so, Israel deliberately blurs the distinction between armed struggle and nonviolent political activity. Documentation, protest, legal assistance, community agricultural work or education about Palestinian identity are all exposed to the same system of arrests, raids, closures, confiscations, threats, interrogations and incarceration.

One of the main tools for implementing this framework of criminalization is mass incarceration. For decades, Israel has arrested and imprisoned hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, including political leaders, community leaders, legislators, activists, students, journalists and human rights defenders. Since October 2023, mass arrests, administrative detention, the disappearance of detainees within the prison system and systematic abuse have increased even further.

Significantly, incarceration does not harm only the person arrested. It removes people from their families, communities and spheres of political action and conveys a broader message: participation in public or political activity may be met with violence, imprisonment without trial and torture.

Beyond incarceration, Israel constricts Palestinian public space through the suppression of demonstrations, raids on institutions, intrusions into phones, persecution on social media and threats against activists. Communities in which people attempt to organize politically are collectively punished. A demonstration, documentation of violence, a social-media

post, journalistic coverage, student activity or participation in a local committee can all serve as grounds for arrest or harm. The result is self-censorship, fear of organizing and withdrawal from public activity.

The attack on political and social infrastructures also includes an assault on the Palestinian press, civil society organizations and human rights organizations. In 2021 Israel designated six Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations as terrorist organizations. This was not an isolated step but part of a broader effort to reduce Palestinians' ability to document the criminal reality in which they live, organize, represent themselves, turn to legal and international forums, preserve collective knowledge and act as a political collective. When the very demand for the protection of rights and for legal protection is labeled terrorism, one of the main avenues through which Palestinian society can struggle and demand recognition of its rights is undermined.

This is compounded by attacks on Palestinian identity, memory and narrative. Israel acts against national symbols, such as the Palestinian flag, against cultural, educational and religious institutions, against the memory of the Nakba and the Palestinian refugee status, against archives, heritage sites and places where historical memory is preserved; and against spaces where knowledge, memory and belonging are transmitted between generations. Israel's longstanding campaign against UNRWA, which has intensified in recent years, is part of this process.

In October 2024, the Knesset passed legislation prohibiting UNRWA from operating in the territory that Israel defines as sovereign, and barring Israeli state authorities from maintaining contact with the agency. In May 2025, Israel enforced closure orders against UNRWA schools in East Jerusalem, forcing the agency to evacuate all six schools it operates in the city, which were attended by nearly 800 children.

UNRWA provides millions of Palestinian refugees with educational, healthcare, welfare, employment and community services, but attacks on it affect more than the humanitarian aid system: UNRWA is a major institutional framework that continues to recognize Palestinian refugees as a collective with a history, rights and an unresolved political claim that Israel is trying to erase. The attack on UNRWA, coupled with raids on community centers, bookstores, theaters, religious spaces, universities and schools, targets the places through which a society sustains continuity, language, culture and political consciousness.

The status of the Palestinian Authority illustrates the depth of this political dismantling.

The Palestinian Authority is presented as a framework of Palestinian self-government, but in practice it operates within a structure in which Israel controls borders, movement, the population registry, land, resources, security and the economic sphere. Thus, even where Palestinian institutions exist, they operate without sovereignty and in deep dependence on the Israeli system of control. Israel uses this structure to administer the Palestinian population without granting it political rights, while steadily weakening Palestinians' capacity for genuine self-government.

Even under these conditions, Palestinian life continue to exist. Under constant threat of imprisonment, violence and dismantling of their social structures and institutions, Palestinians living in the West Bank continue to organize, document, teach, write, pursue legal action, preserve memory, defend their land, maintain institutions and rebuild community spaces.

Ethnic Cleansing and Territorial Takeover

The way Israel takes over space and the growing manifestations of ethnic cleansing in the West Bank are the clearest expressions of the two dimensions of colonial elimination: dismantling, on the one hand, the conditions for Palestinian existence in the territory, while establishing, on the other hand, a contiguous and institutionalized Israeli space. This is carried out through dispossession, destruction, prevention of development, expulsion and displacement of Palestinian communities, alongside the establishment of settlements, outposts and farms, road construction, infrastructure development, the expansion of jurisdictional areas, and the buildup of a military apparatus serving Israeli presence.

Control over land is not merely control over territory. Land is a condition for life: a home, livelihood, agriculture, movement, water, education, social ties, communal memory and a political horizon. Thus, beyond economic damage, land dispossession also affects the fabric of life and Palestinians' ability to exist as a collective with territorial, social and political continuity.

The tools Israel uses to take over land in the West Bank have existed for decades. For decades, Israel has declared areas "state land," "closed military zones," "firing zones," "nature reserves" and archaeological sites; prevented Palestinian planning and construction; demolished homes and infrastructure; closed areas to Palestinians; and allocated land,

budgets and infrastructure to settlements. Ostensibly, these measures are justified on various grounds: security, planning, environmental and archaeological considerations. In practice, however, they shrink Palestinian living space and expand Jewish space.

In recent years, this systemic activity has accelerated and become more overt. The transfer of civilian powers in the West Bank to political actors identified with the settlement project, the establishment of the Settlement Administration in the Ministry of Defense, the expansion of powers over planning, construction, land and enforcement, and the promotion of land registration in Area C are not neutral administrative measures. They transfer land administration in the West Bank from a military framework to an Israeli civilian-governmental framework that openly promotes settlement expansion, de facto annexation and the displacement of Palestinians from the territory.

This is one of the most direct realizations of what the Decisive Plan calls "victory through settlement": turning Jewish-Israeli sovereignty "from the river to the sea" into "an accomplished fact, a fact not open to discussion or negotiation." In other words, settlement is intended to reshape the territory so that a Palestinian state, Palestinian sovereignty and Palestinian territorial contiguity become impossible.

Settler farms are among the most effective tools for implementing the logic of elimination. A farm can quickly take effective control of extensive grazing areas. A small number of settlers, a flock, an off-road vehicle, weapons, military or police backing, and budgetary or infrastructure support are enough to change the balance of power across an entire area. Once a farm is established near a Palestinian community, the same pattern repeats: access is blocked, residents are threatened and attacked, property is damaged, flocks are harmed, and state forces are used against the residents until Palestinians are forced to leave. The farms receive budgets, infrastructure, allocations of grazing land, military protection, equipment and weapons, and sometimes direct coordination with the military. Settler militias in the West Bank are therefore not a rogue external force or an exception to the state system but an operational arm of the mechanism of territorial control. Official state bodies do not have to expel every community themselves. They create conditions in which armed settlers, with state backing, make Palestinian life impossible.

Farms and outposts do more than expand the area under Israeli control; they also create direct, daily friction within Palestinian living spaces. Unlike mechanisms of separation

and remote administration, this involves a close and continuous Israeli presence: armed settlers in grazing areas, roads that run close to homes, soldiers repeatedly appearing inside the communities and areas where Palestinians live. Physical proximity itself thus becomes a form of control that creates a constant threat, disrupts daily routines and turns ordinary activities into potential sites of violent confrontation.

Declarations of state lands, the denial of building permits, demolitions, allocations of grazing lands, the establishment of farms and outposts and the actions of settler militias are all components in a single system. When a Palestinian community is forced to leave because of violence, denial of grazing access, demolitions, blocked water access, movement restrictions or loss of livelihood, the departure is sometimes presented as a choice. In practice, it is forced displacement, after which the vacated areas rapidly pass into settler control. Settlers build access roads, set up caravans, establish additional farms and fence off land, thereby erasing the previous Palestinian presence from the landscape. Palestinians remain displaced, sometimes only a short distance from their land, but without any real possibility of returning to the forms of life, livelihood and community that existed there.

The territorial takeover is not aimed only at preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state in the future. It pushes Palestinians into crowded, disconnected and permit-dependent enclaves while Israeli space expands, becomes more connected and institutionalized. This is a clear mechanism of elimination: it does not require the immediate disappearance of all Palestinians from the territory, but renders their presence discontinuous and unprotected, exposing them to further displacement.

Conclusion

In the West Bank, the five domains of Israeli action against Palestinians – violence and intimidation, movement restrictions, economic strangulation, social and political destruction, and ethnic cleansing and territorial takeover – operate together as an integrated mechanism of elimination. They harm Palestinians' daily lives as individuals, families and communities and deny them the conditions necessary to exist as a political, social and territorial body.

Israel operates this system through state institutions, legislation, budgets, security forces, planning, infrastructure, permit systems and the settlement apparatus, which comprises

settlements, outposts, farms and armed settler militias. Some actions are still framed in terms of security needs, planning or law enforcement. But as these practices become more overt, coordinated and explicit, their broader political purpose is rendered increasingly apparent: shrinking Palestinian space, dismantling Palestinian continuity, weakening institutions and representation, pushing communities out, and denying Palestinians an independent political future.

The Decisive Plan openly formulates this purpose and provides explicit political language for what the mechanisms of elimination implement. It presents the defeat of Palestinians as taking one of three forms: remaining under conditions of relinquishment and dependence, leaving, or facing suppression by force.

This also has political and international implications. The international community faces an Israeli apartheid regime deploying mechanisms of elimination at an accelerated pace within a settler-colonial project. The language of "conflict management" or a "return to the political process" is incompatible with the reality at hand; it helps obscure the nature of the system: a regime that organizes space on the basis of Jewish supremacy and deploys systems of control, coercion and repression against Palestinians in order to preserve that supremacy and deny them a free and equal political future.

The international community cannot continue to regard the reality in the West Bank as a temporary crisis, the result of isolated incidents of settler violence or a deviation that can be rectified through calls for restraint and a return to the political process. The impunity Israel enjoys, underpinned by extensive political, diplomatic, military and economic support, allows the elimination project to advance. The genocide in Gaza did not produce the shift in international policy the scale of the crimes requires, and the same impunity now enables continued violence, displacement, dispossession, economic strangulation, and social and political dismantling in the West Bank. Recognizing the reality described here requires urgent and unequivocal action to stop the harm and protect Palestinians' individual and collective rights.

4. THE MECHANISM OF ELIMINATION IN THE WEST BANK

A. VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION

Introduction

This chapter examines the mechanism of elimination through the violence Israel inflicts on Palestinians in the West Bank. It considers the full range of actors involved, including official bodies such as the military, the police, settlement security squads and Regional Defense Battalions (known by the Hebrew acronym "Hagmar"). It traces the shift from periodic military raids to sustained and increasingly destructive patterns, the expanded use of lethal force and relaxation of the open-fire policy, and the growing role of armed settler militias operating in coordination and cooperation with official forces. The chapter also examines forms of intimidation that do not necessarily involve lethal force, including invasive surveillance and monitoring systems; the near-constant presence of soldiers and armed settlers on roads and inside villages; nighttime home invasions; threats and extortion; arrests, abuse and torture; sexual violence; and the desecration of bodies.

The chapter shows how Israeli violence functions as an integrated, continuous system through which Israel expands its control over the West Bank and limits Palestinians' ability to continue to exist both as individuals and as a society.

The effects of this ongoing violence extend far beyond any single incident, especially since October 2023. It creates a persistent reality of fear, uncertainty and vulnerability in which even ordinary activities, such as going to work or school, cultivating land, grazing livestock, traveling for medical care or staying at home, involve fear of being subjected to violence. In this sense, intimidation is not a byproduct of the ongoing violence but one of its central aims: it restricts the ability of individuals and communities to act, shapes their decisions, confines them to their homes and deepens Israel's control over Palestinians.

The shift in the nature of the violence since October 2023, as described in this chapter, marks a move from increasing reliance on bureaucratic abuse using legal, planning and administrative tools and coupled with sporadic violence, to a comprehensive system of direct physical violence by official representatives of the regime as well as civilian actors

acting as a complementary force to official state bodies. The violence described here is measured not only by the number of people killed, injured, arrested and imprisoned, but also by its cumulative effect, its ability to turn routine decisions into a constant risk-benefit calculation. This reality, permeated by anxiety, forces West Bank residents into constant vigilance, disrupts daily life and weakens personal, family and community resilience. All of this serves the logic of erasure, which aims to push West Bank residents out and dismantle the structures that bind them together as a national collective.

For decades, Israel has framed its use of force against Palestinians in the West Bank as a response to "security incidents," deliberately focusing Israeli public discourse on discrete military operations and actions and on episodes of escalation limited to a specific time and place. Yet these incidents unfold against a different daily reality: persistent violence that is used even in the absence of any actual Palestinian resistance and that permeates every aspect of life in the West Bank. This reality rests on a constant, massive military presence in the heart of a civilian population. Israeli forces routinely raid cities, towns, villages and refugee camps; invade homes; carry out arrests and searches; operate permanent and temporary checkpoints that restrict Palestinians' movement; and subject them to various forms of surveillance. Resistance to these actions, and at times Palestinians' mere presence in the space, is often met with force, including live fire, arrest and repeated abuse.

Settler violence emerged as an integral part of the regime's violence as early as the first decade of the occupation, with the establishment of the first settlements in the West Bank. Over time, it spread into Palestinian residential areas and homes, backed by Israeli forces and protected by various state mechanisms. Over the years, B'Tselem has repeatedly documented how settlers attack Palestinians, damage their property and try to push them off their land, while the state's response ranges from turning a blind eye to actively assisting. For three decades now, B'Tselem has documented Israeli forces again and again escorting attacking settlers, enabling and participating in the attacks; meanwhile, soldiers have described how settlement residents take part in military decision-making and influence military policy in the West Bank. In some cases, they effectively command soldiers in the field. The lines between the different perpetrators of violence have blurred as military, police and settlers cooperate more closely, operating as complementary parts of a single mechanism of control.

Violence in the West Bank Amid the Genocide in Gaza

As Israel has continued devastating the Gaza Strip since October 2023, senior officials have repeatedly stated their intention to apply the "Gaza model" to the West Bank as well. Defense Minister Israel Katz, for example, explicitly demanded that military operations in the West Bank mirror its conduct in Gaza, while Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who also serves as a minister in the Ministry of Defense with responsibility for the Settlement Administration, threatened West Bank residents that they would face the same fate as Gaza's if they continued to "support terrorism": "Tulkarm and Jenin will look like Jabalya and Shuja'iya; Nablus and Ramallah will look like Rafah and Khan Yunis. They too will become uninhabitable piles of rubble, and their residents will be forced to wander and look for new lives elsewhere."

Meanwhile, several settlers living in the West Bank were appointed to key positions in the senior ranks of the military establishment, perhaps most notably Avi Bluth, who grew up in the settlement of Neve Tzuf and attended the Bnei David pre-military academy in Eli, an educational program for high school graduates with far-right leanings. Upon taking office as GOC Central Command in July 2024, Bluth declared his intention to pursue an "offensive" and proactive approach. He later demonstrated that this also meant collective punishment of entire Palestinian communities. The effects of this process were most apparent during Operation Iron Wall in the refugee camps of the northern West Bank in January 2025: not only violent raids of the kind carried out in the past, but widespread destruction of civilian structures and infrastructure, using airstrikes and heavy machinery in densely populated residential areas, in patterns that echoed those used in the Gaza Strip since October 2023. Israel reduced residential buildings and basic life-sustaining infrastructure in the northern West Bank to rubble.

The Israeli military has also significantly relaxed its open-fire policy across the West Bank, as reflected in the sharp rise in the number of Palestinians killed and injured since October 2023. In May 2026, GOC Central Command Avi Bluth outlined the military's killing policy in the West Bank, saying, "we are killing like we haven't killed since 1967." Bluth also claimed that "of 1,500 people killed in the past three years, only 4% were uninvolved." B'Tselem figures show this has no basis in reality. Of the 1,037 Palestinians killed by the Israeli military in the West Bank between 7 October 2023 and 30 June 2026, about a quarter, 237 people, were minors, and about 21 were women. The circumstances in which

they were killed, detailed in B'Tselem's fatality database, show how Israel systematically constructs after-the-fact justifications for killing Palestinians: first by labeling them as threats, and then by erasing the concrete circumstances that led to their killing, even when those killed were civilians, including children, who posed no danger to anyone.

Since October 2023, thousands of settlers living in the West Bank have been called up for reserve duty in the areas where they live. Some were integrated into settlement security squads, which were expanded and heavily armed, while others were deployed in Regional Defense Battalions in various areas the West Bank. In addition, public officials promoted and encouraged the mass arming of settlers, including those who were not called up for active service.

The proliferation of firearms among Israelis, in conjunction with the increasing dehumanization of Palestinians and the widespread public demand for revenge for the Hamas-led attack of October 2023, particularly on the far right, has made settler violence more organized, lethal, pervasive and direct than before. Numerous planned, synchronized attacks by settlers outfitted with military clothing, firearms and gear have been documented, while distinguishing among the different agents of violence has become more difficult. Meanwhile, encouragement from the senior command for soldiers to adopt an "offensive" and "proactive" approach has fed into the broader processes of dehumanization, creating fertile ground for the deliberate abuse of Palestinian residents, at times with soldiers and settlers acting together.

The Israeli Military: From Sporadic Raids to Permanent Destruction

For decades, the Israeli military has carried out sporadic raids on refugee camps and other residential areas throughout the West Bank. These raids have followed a broadly consistent pattern: dozens or hundreds of soldiers, sometimes with police or Shin Bet personnel, enter a city, town, village or refugee camp. For hours, and sometimes days, the forces use heavy gunfire in the heart of residential neighborhoods, break into buildings and conduct searches and arrests. Refugee camps in the northern West Bank, in particular, are subjected to especially frequent and lethal raids, including the widespread killing of civilians and damage to and destruction of homes, buildings and infrastructure. Over the years, military officials, the Shin Bet and Israeli media outlets have described these

areas as hubs of militant activity, casting the camps and their residents as legitimate targets for extensive military force and exposing the entire population to ongoing harm and collective punishment.

This framing obscures the fact that these are refugee camps with densely populated residential neighborhoods where civilians, including children, older people and families, are simply trying to live their lives. During raids, the military generally seals off the area, blocks roads and restricts movement and access to medical care, at times putting residents' lives at risk. These closures can last for days, bringing daily life to a complete standstill: schools close, businesses shut down, and residents cannot get to work.

Military officials frequently allege that armed Palestinian organizations use the refugee camps, some of the West Bank's most densely populated civilian areas, as bases for hiding and operating, and their residents as human shields. Yet the military's methods and the devastation it inflicts indicate that these are not targeted attacks on armed individuals but a broad pattern of harming the civilian population and its living conditions through collective punishment and intimidation.

In July 2023, the Israeli military raided Jenin Refugee Camp in the northern West Bank in an offensive called Operation Home and Garden. Over two days of airstrikes, tank fire, bulldozer demolitions and a ground invasion by about 1,000 armed soldiers, the military caused massive destruction to buildings and infrastructure in the camp, home to about 23,600 people. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that during the raid, military forces moved from house to house through holes they bored in exterior walls, took over some homes for extended periods and caused extensive property damage. The military blocked vehicle and pedestrian access to the camp and prevented ambulances from entering to treat the wounded. It also fired live ammunition and launched stun grenades and tear gas toward several hospitals in the camp. Twelve people were killed during the operation, four of them children. More than 120 people were injured, and 3,500 were displaced from their homes.

Since October 2023, and especially since Operation Iron Wall began in January 2025, Israeli military raids on refugee camps and other residential areas throughout the West Bank have entered a new phase, larger, more intense and more aggressive than before. In Operation Iron Wall, which began in Jenin Refugee Camp and continued to the Tulkarm,

Nur Shams and al-Far'ah camps, the temporary takeover of camps in the northern West Bank gave way to mass destruction of buildings and infrastructure and the expulsion of tens of thousands of residents. During the operation, the military displaced about 33,000 of the refugee camps residents from their homes and declared it would maintain its hold on the camps for the time being. As of the end of June 2026, it has not declared an end to the operation and has kept most residents from returning. According to B'Tselem figures, from the beginning of the operation through the end of June 2025, military forces killed 83 people by gunfire and airstrikes in cities and camps in the northern West Bank, including three women and 14 minors. The forces also destroyed buildings and infrastructure on an unprecedented scale through controlled demolitions and extensive use of bulldozers, and caused further damage and destruction to homes, cars and public property by invading densely populated residential areas with tanks and armored personnel carriers.

One of the clearest signs of both the escalation in violence and the replication of warfare tactics used in Gaza is the return to airstrikes in densely populated residential areas in the West Bank for the first time since the Second Intifada. According to B'Tselem's records, between 21 June 2023, the date of Israel's first airstrike in the West Bank since the Second Intifada and 23 May 2026, 269 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank by airstrikes. Of those killed, 45 were minors. At least 128 of the casualties were not taking part in any fighting at the time of the strike. By comparison, over more than 18 years, from 2005 to early October 2023, the military killed 14 people in airstrikes in the West Bank. Camp residents who gave testimony to B'Tselem after October 2023 described what they saw in the camps after the strikes: massive destruction of residential buildings, bodies buried under rubble, and body parts, including those of children, scattered in streets, homes, a café and a playground.

During rounds of fighting with Iran in June 2025 and again between February and March 2026, B'Tselem documented a systematic, large-scale and recurring pattern in military raids on residential areas in the Nablus, Jenin, Ramallah and Hebron districts: soldiers took over private homes and converted them into military positions, interrogation centers and sleeping quarters. In June 2025, the military took over at least 60 buildings in this way. Between February and March 2026, it took over at least 130 homes. During the takeovers, soldiers ordered residents to leave their homes or confined them to a single room, sometimes separating men, women and children. They searched the homes for periods ranging from a few minutes to several hours. When soldiers left hours, and

sometimes days, later and residents were allowed to return, they found that the soldiers had looted money and equipment, eaten their food, slept in their beds and left behind broken furniture, garbage, cigarette butts and, in some cases, feces. Some residents told B'Tselem they were afraid to return home for fear their homes would be taken over again or become military targets.

This type of takeover is not new. In military jargon it was previously known as the "straw widow" procedure. B'Tselem testimonies, however, document increased use of this practice.

Escalating violence is also reflected in the reported increase since October 2023 in Israeli forces' use of Palestinian residents as human shields during raids on residential areas or home invasions, often on the orders of senior military commanders. Palestinians, including children and teenagers, are forced, often at gunpoint, to carry out military tasks that place their lives at real risk. They are ordered to remove suspicious objects from roads, tell people to leave their homes so the military can arrest them (the "neighbor procedure"), or stand in front of soldiers while the soldiers fire from behind them, among other tasks.

Open-Fire Policy

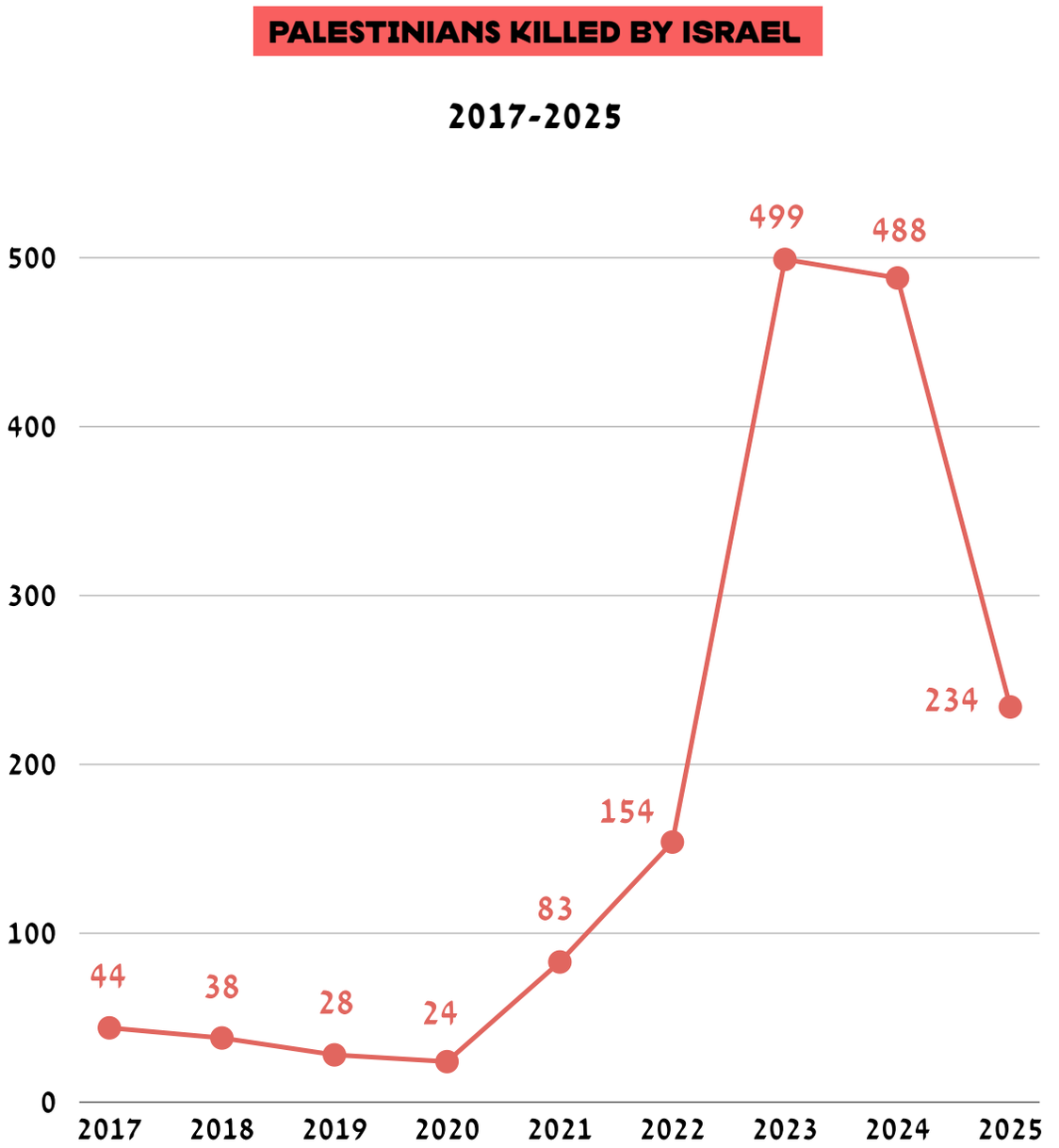
Background: The Israeli Military's Open-Fire Policy

The Israeli military's open-fire regulations are not public. Testimonies given by soldiers to Breaking the Silence over the years indicate that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, soldiers are briefed orally on the main rules rather than given the regulations in a formal written version. Many soldiers testified that the regulations change and expand according to the tone set by the particular commander on the ground. According to various reports, as well as statements by state representatives in legal proceedings, Israel argued that the regulations were allegedly formulated to fit Israeli and international law governing the use of lethal force. In practice, however, due to their opacity, they serve the military and soldiers in the field to evade accountability for harming Palestinians rather than restraining or limiting the use of force. Comparing publicly available information with soldiers' testimonies shows that although the regulations permit lethal fire only in cases of a "real and immediate" danger to life, they set no clear criteria for determining when

that threshold is met, leaving the decision up to soldiers in the field. Their subjective sense of danger is then used to justify disproportionate force. Over the years, Israel's open-fire policy has grown more permissive, at times amid calls by public officials to loosen it so soldiers can protect themselves, even at the cost of widespread killing of Palestinians.

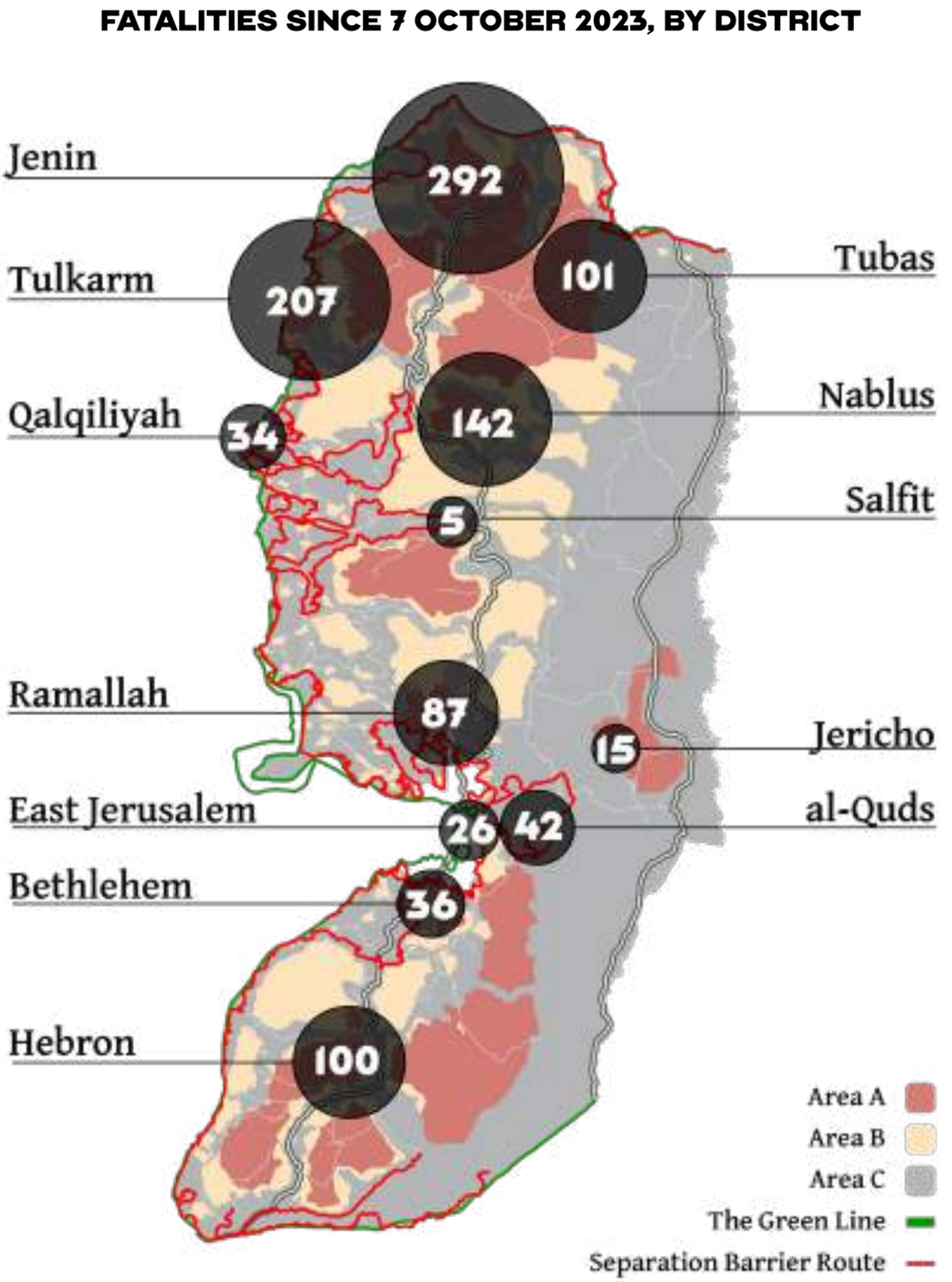
From the beginning of the Second Intifada (September 2000) through 6 October 2023, Israeli forces killed 2,657 people in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Of those killed, 519 were children and 83 were women. During those years, 83 Palestinian West Bank residents were killed by Israeli civilians, and 15 were killed by Israelis whose status as civilians or members of the security forces is unknown. Tens of thousands more were injured, including life-altering injuries causing physical or psychosocial disabilities. From 7 October 2023 through 30 June 2026, Israel killed 1,087 Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Of those killed, 242 were children and 21 were women. Of the total number, 35 were killed by Israeli civilians and 15 by Israelis whose status as civilians or members of the security forces is unknown. The rest were killed by Israeli forces.

Most of the Palestinians killed and injured during these years were not taking part in violent activity or exchanges of fire with military forces when they were shot, nor had they been targeted for killing or assassination. Some were targets for arrest and posed no danger to forces in the field. Others were near people defined as wanted, misidentified as wanted, or simply happened to enter an alley or road where soldiers had set up military ambushes. Some were shot while climbing the Separation Barrier to enter Jerusalem or cross the Green Line to reach their workplaces.



October 2023 Onward

The change in the Israeli military's practices since October 2023 is reflected most clearly in the unprecedented broadening of the circumstances in which soldiers are permitted to open fire in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including situations in which forces on the ground face no life-threatening, or any other, danger.



*Fatalities from 7 October 2023 to 30 June 2026

Source: B'Tselem

Several cases, including the killing of members of the Bani 'Odeh family in Tammun in March 2026, and seven-month-old Sam Abu Haikal in Hebron in June 2026, drew public attention in Israel and prompted media discussion. In both cases, the military portrayed the shooting as the soldiers' response to "sensing danger," claimed that the vehicles carrying the victims had "accelerated toward them," and presented the incidents as exceptional cases.

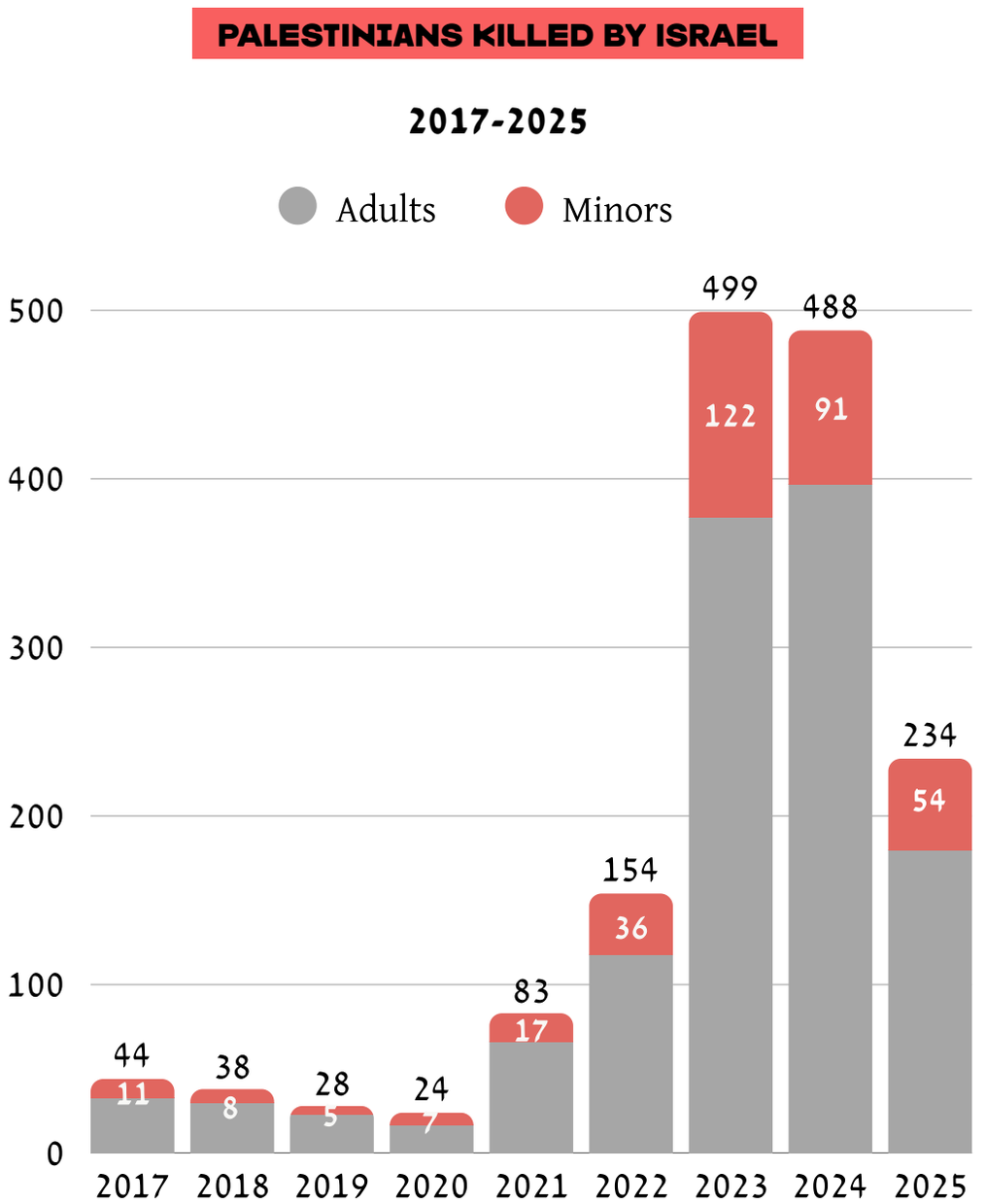
Given B'Tselem's documentation of similar cases since October 2023, the killings of the Bani 'Odeh children and infant Sam Abu Haikal were not, in fact, exceptional in either respect: the victims were children and teenagers, and they were shot alongside family members or in front of their parents. Before the Bani 'Odeh children and infant Sam were killed in 2026, Israeli forces had already killed 54 children in the West Bank in 2025. They included ten-year-old Sadam Rajab, who in January 2025 was shot in the back by soldiers when he stepped outside his home in Tulkarm to speak to his mother on the phone and died of his wounds ten days later; 13-year-old 'Amru Qabha, whom soldiers shot as he walked down a street in his hometown of Ya'bad in Jenin District in July 2025. When 'Amru's father arrived after the shooting, the soldiers attacked him, handcuffed him and made him sit next to his dying son, and for about half an hour prevented an ambulance at the scene from evacuating the boy; 14-year-old Islam Majarmah, whom soldiers shot dead in September 2025 after he and his family visited the ruins of their homes, destroyed military in Jenin Refugee Camp; and 14-year-old Muhammad Masqalah, shot by soldiers that same day while he and other teenagers watched camp residents trying to return to their homes.

According to B'Tselem figures, the number of children and teenagers killed in the West Bank was already trending up in 2022, with a jump to 34, compared to 16 the previous year. Since October 2023, that figure has reached an unprecedented high: that year, Israel killed 120 children and teenagers, 80 of them in less than three months between 7 October and the end of that year. In 2024, Israel killed 89 children and teenagers, and in 2025 it killed 54. From the beginning of 2026 through the end of June, Israel killed 15 children and teenagers throughout the West Bank.

The sharp rise in the killing of children and teenagers in the West Bank cannot be divorced from the more than 21,000 Palestinian children Israel has killed as part of its genocidal assault in the Gaza Strip since October 2023. This inconceivable number has not prompted a public demand to stop the killing. The absence of opposition in Israel reflects, among other things, the extent to which Palestinians have been dehumanized,

a process that, even through silence, sustains a reality in which killing children and teenagers is treated as routine.

More broadly, **since October 2023, reports of soldiers using lethal fire against Palestinians of all ages in the West Bank have sharply increased. Between 7 October 2023 and 30 June 2026, Israel killed 1,087 Palestinians throughout the West Bank. About a quarter of them, 242, were children, and 21 were women. Of these, 35 were killed by an Israeli civilian agent, and 15 by an Israeli actor, unknown whether civilian or military.**



On 10 January 2026, Shaker Ja'bari, 58, was driving through Hebron with his daughter, Raslan Ja'bari, and her four young children. When he saw a group of soldiers walking up the street ahead of him, he slowed down. One of the soldiers then fired three shots in his direction. One bullet passed through the windshield and struck Ja'bari in the forehead. He died shortly afterward. Two of Ja'bari's grandchildren, 11-year-old Juri and nine-year-old Muhammad, got out of the car and ran away, shouting and crying. A resident who witnessed the incident helped Ja'bari's daughter escape from the car with her two other children, two-year-old Julia and five-year-old Rayan, and took them into the home of relatives nearby, without their older siblings. From there, the family tried to call an ambulance. According to the Red Crescent and a paramedic who spoke with B'Tselem, two ambulances tried to reach the scene of the shooting from different directions, but the military prevented them from approaching. Shortly afterward, soldiers removed Ja'bari's body from the car and placed it in a military vehicle. In the hours that followed, the military imposed a closure on the area. Soldiers went from house to house and business to business in the neighborhood, checked security cameras and confiscated footage of the incident from one store's camera. Later that day, the IDF Spokesperson issued a statement describing the victim as a terrorist, without presenting any evidence, and claimed: "IDF troops operating in the area fired at a terrorist who attempted to run them over; the terrorist was neutralized." The following morning, the military returned Ja'bari's body to his family. Later that day, the military qualified its initial account, stating: "An initial inquiry found that an IDF force operating in the area responded with fire at a vehicle that accelerated toward it, due to concern over an immediate threat. At this stage, no clear findings have been uncovered indicating that this was a deliberate attack. The incident is still under review." As of the writing of this report, the military still has the security camera footage and refuses to release it.

Several killings investigated by B'Tselem and other organizations since October 2023 amount to executions. In June 2025, during a military raid, brothers Nidal and Khaled 'Amirah were walking through the alleys of Nablus's Old City on their way to help a family evacuate. Soldiers detained, beat and then fatally shot them. The military then asserted they were "terrorists." A forensic analysis of video footage published in December 2025 by B'Tselem and Index showed that the brothers had posed no danger to anyone: Khaled was executed with a point-blank gunshot to the head while pinned to the ground and surrounded by armed soldiers, and Nidal was shot in the back at close range when he had no way to escape. After they were shot, Nidal was left where he lay and bled to death; soldiers prevented paramedics from approaching.

Months later, in November 2025, Israeli forces were filmed shooting and killing 39-year-old Yusef 'Asa'sah and 26-year-old al-Muntaser bel-lah 'Abdallah at point-blank range during a raid on Jenin. As the footage shows, the two Palestinians, whom the military defined as wanted, emerged from a building with their hands raised and surrendered to Border Police officers after a military excavator began demolishing the building they had been in. The Border Police officers then ordered them back into the building and told them to sit on the ground, before executing them.

Numerous reports and recordings published or obtained by B'Tselem during this period documented cases in which soldiers denied their victims medical assistance and left them to die at the scene of the shooting. In 13 of the 54 incidents in which the military killed children and teenagers in 2025, soldiers delayed or entirely prevented access by medical teams or residents who tried to provide medical care or evacuate the wounded. In at least nine cases, soldiers fired live ammunition into the air or toward residents and medical teams to prevent them from approaching the wounded, treating them and evacuating them to hospitals. When soldiers themselves removed the wounded from the scene, Palestinian residents and medical teams were denied all access. It is unknown whether the soldiers provided the wounded with any medical treatment before they were pronounced dead, or whether any attempt was made to save their lives.

In November 2025, a large group of soldiers was seen gathered in an alley in al-Far'ah Refugee Camp in Tubas District around 14-year-old Jadallah Jadallah, who was lying on his back after being shot. A video filmed at the scene shows Jadallah reaching out toward the soldiers and begging for his life. His parents and siblings watched from their nearby home. "I rushed up to the second floor, where there's a window overlooking the entrance to the alley." his father, Jihad Jadallah, said in testimony to B'Tselem. "My wife came up after me, and then we saw our son, we recognized his clothes, lying on the ground, moving and writhing, with many soldiers around him. We all went into shock. The kids also came and saw their brother lying on the ground, surrounded by soldiers. None of us could do anything or get close." After watching him from the second floor, Jadallah's mother decided to go out to the soldiers and beg for her son's life. In response, the soldiers fired at her. They left Jadallah to bleed to death for at least 45 minutes, and then took his body away. "They injured us twice: when they killed him and by holding his body," his father later told Haaretz. "I pass by the cemetery and think to myself: I wish my son as here. That's all."

Changes to the Open-Fire Policy During Military Operations

As Operation Iron Wall began and the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip took effect in January 2025, the Israeli government reportedly decided to add "increasing offensive activity" in the West Bank to its official "war objectives". Soldiers interviewed by Haaretz said that during the operation, the commander of the Judea and Samaria Division authorized troops to fire live ammunition at any vehicle approaching an army checkpoint from a "combat zone," to force the driver to stop before reaching the inspection point. It was also reported that GOC Central Command Avi Bluth authorized his troops to shoot to kill anyone "messing with the ground." This disproportionate order was justified on "security" grounds, on the claim that a person seen "messing with the ground" might be planting an explosive device.

Within the first days of Operation Iron Wall in January 2025, reports emerged of widespread civilian killings in the areas targeted by military raids in the northern West Bank. On the first day of the operation, a video circulated online showed a family driving in an attempt to escape military fire until the driver, the father, was shot dead in front of his family. On the fourth day of the operation, soldiers shot two-year-old Layla al-Khatib while she was eating dinner with her family in their home in a village near Jenin. In a response to Haaretz, the military said that soldiers had fired at a house "where, according to intelligence, a wanted terrorist had barricaded himself" and that "immediately after realizing they had hit a girl, the troops called the Red Crescent and also evacuated her pregnant mother." It was later stated that "the troops arrived at the building and began handling the incident gradually, including several announcements over a loudspeaker calling on the occupants to come out. After no one came out of the house, the troops continued the procedure and opened fire." However, a B'Tselem investigation found that the family heard no announcement directed at their home, that Layla was evacuated for treatment in a private vehicle, and that her aunt and mother, who was not pregnant, were evacuated in an ambulance called by a relative. No one had barricaded himself in their apartment. The only man in the apartment that evening was Layla's grandfather, Bassam 'As'ous, and the forces did not arrest him. The family, as well as a Haaretz reporter who visited the scene, said the building and surrounding buildings were riddled with holes from indiscriminate fire.

The open-fire regulations described above illustrate the "Gazafication" of the Israeli military's methods in the West Bank: mere presence in an area, or simply engaging in

routine activities, is treated as sufficient grounds for lethal force, even without any concrete indication of an immediate threat. The rule permitting fire at vehicles leaving a "combat zone" echoes the "kill zones" documented in the Gaza Strip: areas with arbitrary boundaries, sometimes unclear even to the soldiers themselves, where troops were permitted to open fire on anyone seen inside. Permission to shoot anyone "messing with the ground" reflects the same logic: attributing hostile intent on the basis of a general, unverified suspicion and allowing lethal force even when the person poses no actual danger to the forces. As with patterns documented in the Gaza Strip since October 2023, here too the distinction between civilians and combatants and between suspicion and an actual threat is blurred, while the threshold for lethal force continues to fall.

This permissive open-fire policy led, among other things, to the killing of Sundus Shalabi, a 20-year-old woman from Nur Shams Refugee Camp who was eight months pregnant. Several weeks after Operation Iron Wall began, some Nur Shams residents who had heard about the military raids on the Tulkarm and Jenin refugee camps decided to flee before military forces expelled them. Among them was Sundus Shalabi, who left her home several hours after the raid began, at 3:30 A.M., with her husband Yazan and his brother Bilal. The three got into their car and, shortly after setting off, encountered a group of soldiers. Yazan, who was driving, tried to reverse, but the soldiers fired at the car and hit him in the head. He lost control of the vehicle, which rolled down a slope until it stopped. After the car came to a stop, Sundus and Bilal got out. Within moments, soldiers approached them, arrested Bilal and took him to where the other soldiers were standing. That was the last time Sundus Shalabi was seen alive. According to Bilal, she was not injured when the soldiers separated them. Haaretz reported that according to an initial military investigation, Sundus managed to get out of the car and was then shot in the chest after soldiers suspected her because she had "looked suspiciously at the ground"; a hospital report, however, states that she was shot in the back. Because of military activity in the camp, Palestinian rescue teams reached the scene only several hours later and found Sundus dead. By then, her fetus could no longer be saved.

Changes to the Open-Fire Policy During Routine Military Activity

In line with the approach applied in the Gaza Strip, under which any part of the Strip can be designated a combat zone without formal operational justification, the distinction

previously drawn in the West Bank between law-enforcement and combat activity is gradually being blurred as well. Taken together, the military's shooting patterns and statements by the senior command indicate that since October 2023, more than ever before, live ammunition is treated as a legitimate tool in routine law-enforcement operations.

This is reflected in the steep rise in the number of people killed during military arrest operations. According to B'Tselem's figures, over roughly two and a half years, from 7 October 2023 through 30 June 2026, at least 271 people were killed during Israeli military arrest operations in the West Bank, including 5 women and 44 minors. About 74% of them, at least 200 people, were not the targets of the arrest operation at all. By comparison, over roughly two decades, from the beginning of the First Intifada in September 2000 through 6 October 2023, at least 577 people were killed during arrest operations, including 5 women and 73 minors. Of them, 314 were the targets of the arrest operations, while 263, more than 45% of those killed, were not.

The increasingly permissive approach to using live fire since October 2023 is also evident in the rise in killings during routine ambushes by Israeli armed forces throughout the West Bank. Military or Border Police forces routinely take up concealed positions at strategic points along main roads, at intersections, or within residential areas where Palestinians live, and fire live ammunition at residents passing through. In most cases, the person shot poses no immediate threat, and the forces make no attempt to arrest them. The shooting is often carried out without any attempt to verify the person's identity; as a result, simply being present in an area where an ambush has been set up puts Palestinian residents' lives at risk.

In testimony to B'Tselem, 11-year-old Khaled Bani 'Odeh, who lives with his family in the town of Tammun in Tubas District, described being reunited with his father at the end of Ramadan in March 2026. His father, who had worked inside Israel in recent years, would return to the family home for short periods.

> **"He didn't come in the last three months because of work, but he called us every day to make sure we were all okay. Towards the end of Ramadan, we called him, and he told us he would be coming in a day or two. On Friday evening, 13 March 2026, at around 8:00 P.M., after the iftar meal, he finally came home. We were very happy and excited. My brothers, my mother and I waited outside the house to see him coming, because we**

> hadn't seen him in months. We waited for him to do the holiday shopping together and spend the last week of the holiday together.
>
> When we saw him, it was a very happy moment. We hugged him, and then we all went inside. My grandparents were also waiting for him because they loved him very much, and he always looked after them and took care of everything they needed. We spent Friday and Saturday together, and those were two happy days. My mother made the iftar meal and we ate together."

A few days after the father's return, on the night of 14 March 2026, the family went together to Nablus for an outing to mark the end of Ramadan and the approach of Eid al-Fitr.

> "When we reached Nablus [at around midnight], we went to City Mall, which is a new mall that opened there. We spent some time there, ate and drove around the city. We were going to buy clothes too, but at about 1:00 A.M. we decided to go home because it was late. I agreed with my father that we would go back the next day to buy me new clothes. I didn't want to burden him, especially because he worked far away from us, inside Israel.
>
> We left Nablus and headed home to Tammun. The drive together was fun. We were all talking and laughing together. At about 1:30 A.M., we entered Tammun from the south-western entrance and continued driving home. We didn't hear about anything unusual and didn't know there were soldiers in the area.
>
> I was sitting behind my father's seat, my brother Mustafa was sitting behind my mother's seat, my brother Muhammad was sitting in the middle, and my mother was holding my brother 'Othman, who is blind and has special needs, in the front seat."

When they reached the town, undercover Israeli forces in a vehicle with Palestinian license plates opened heavy fire directly at the family's car.

> "I didn't hear any soldier call out to my father to stop before they started shooting. The car windows were open, and we didn't hear anything except the shots.
>
> They fired tens of bullets at us. I thought I was the only one still alive in the car. My mother was covered in blood. She screamed and then went quiet, and I realized she was dead. My father was dying inside the car, reciting the Shahadatein [the declaration of faith usually recited before death], and my brothers weren't moving at all. I thought I was the only one still alive, because when the shooting started I ducked behind my father."
>
> Khaled's father, 38-year-old 'Ali Bani 'Odeh; his mother, 36-year-old Widad; and two of his brothers, six-year-old 'Uthman, who was blind, and five-year-old Muhammad, were killed in the shooting. Khaled and his younger brother, eight-year-old Mustafa, survived. Seconds after the shooting, the soldiers approached the car and opened the door.
>
> "They grabbed me by the hair and dragged me out. My brother Mustafa got out of the car on his own and put his hands on his head. The soldiers took me a few meters away and asked me who was in the car. I answered: my father, my mother and my brothers. Then one of them slapped me and told me I was lying. He asked who else was in the car. I told them it was just my family."

After he was taken out of the car, the soldiers subjected Khaled to a violent interrogation, slapping him and beating him with their rifle butts while insisting that he was Yamen Bani 'Odeh, a 15-year-old boy they were looking for at the time.

> "They threw me on the ground and hit me on my back. They threatened me that if they found anyone else in the car, they would kill me. Then they said: "You're Yamen. You're lying." At first, I didn't even understand who Yamen was. Later, I understood they were looking for a boy called Yamen, who's about 15. They made Mustafa and me sit down by an iron gate and opened the car doors, so we could see the bodies of our whole family, our father, mother and brothers, covered in blood." Full testimony

After the shooting, the military and police told Haaretz that the Bani 'Odeh family's car had accelerated toward the forces and that the soldiers fired because they "felt threatened." A relative of the victims, Majdi Bani 'Odeh, told Haaretz: "The military's version that he [the father] accelerated sounds completely absurd. A father with a mother and four children, who would he accelerate toward?" As of July 2026, when this report was written, Israeli authorities had not investigated the shooters. About three months before the incident, in November 2025, officers from the same Border Police undercover unit were filmed fatally shooting two Jenin residents at close range after they had surrendered. The shooters in this incident were questioned by the Department for the Investigation of Police, but as of the time of writing, no final decision on prosecution has been publicly released.

Since 2021, soldiers have been officially permitted to shoot fleeing Palestinians even when they posed no real and immediate danger to the forces, if they had previously thrown stones or Molotov cocktails. In May 2026, Avi Bluth boasted that "in 2025 we [military forces] killed 42 stone throwers on roads." Asked about cases in which Jewish-Israelis throw stones in the West Bank, Bluth clarified that forces are instructed to use crowd-control measures and the suspect arrest procedure against them. Referring to incidents in which Jewish stone throwers were shot by military forces after being mistaken for Palestinians, he explained: "Every such incident has very serious sociological implications. I'm not sure we need to go that far. We don't have to resort to shooting, and yes, there is some discrimination."

In 2022, soldiers were given permission to shoot at the lower bodies of Palestinians who were crossing the Separation Barrier or trying to sabotage it. As detailed below in the chapter on economic strangulation, following the sweeping revocation of Israeli work permits and the growing economic crisis in the West Bank after October 2023, the number of Palestinian workers entering Israel without a permit surged, and Israel moved to further loosen the open-fire regulations.

GOC Central Command Avi Bluth took credit for relaxing the open-fire regulations on Palestinians crossing the Separation Barrier, boasting that, "There are lots of 'limping monuments' in Palestinian villages today, people who tried to infiltrate and got hit, so there is a price they pay." From 7 October 2023 through mid-July 2026, B'Tselem documented 21 cases in which the Israeli military killed Palestinians trying to cross the barrier, one of them a minor.

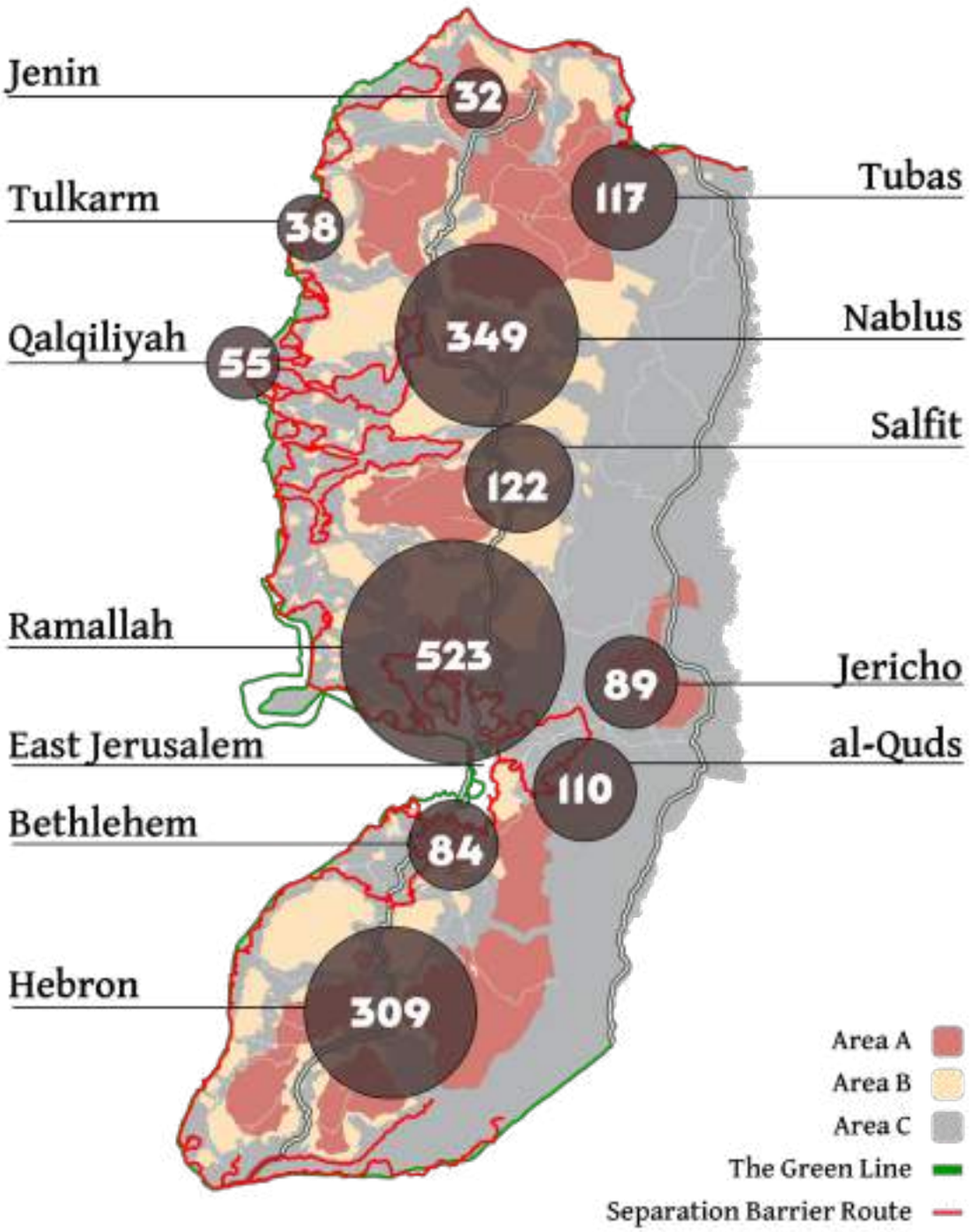
One System: Cooperation Between the Military and Settlers

2022 Onward: The Era of Pogroms

Throughout 2022, settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank grew significantly in both scale and intensity. OCHA recorded 856 incidents in which Palestinians were injured or their property was damaged as a result of settler violence in 2022, an average of two attacks a day. This was the highest number of incidents recorded since 2005, when OCHA began collecting data on settler violence, and a 58% increase over the previous year (2021). In these incidents, settlers blocked access routes and harassed Palestinian residents in their cars; invaded residential areas and homes, looted and vandalized property, injured and killed residents with increasing frequency; violently expelled residents from farmland and grazing areas at gunpoint, burned orchards, damaged and stole crops and agricultural equipment, stole, brutalized and killed livestock.

These attacks range from localized acts by individuals to planned and coordinated pogroms perpetrated by groups of dozens or hundreds of settlers. They follow a common pattern: groups of settlers invade an isolated Palestinian community, village or town, often escorted by Israeli military forces or in their presence. Some of the invaders are masked, often carrying firearms; others carry clubs, axes, stones, Molotov cocktails, pepper spray and other instruments of violence. Once the settler militias reach the homes, they begin throwing stones or beating residents, often without distinguishing between men, women and children, and sometimes fire live ammunition. In many cases, the attackers cause extensive damage to private property, businesses and community buildings, and set structures on fire, sometimes with people inside. Soldiers present during these attacks often use their authority to facilitate them and assist the assailants, including by firing tear gas at Palestinians trying to protect themselves and their property or arresting victims at the demand of their attackers.

SETTLER VIOLENCE INCIDENTS IN 2025, BY DISTRICT



United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) figures for 2025

A prominent example of this pattern is the pogrom settlers carried out in the town of Huwarah in February 2023. The trigger was a shooting in which an armed Palestinian shot and killed the brothers Hallel and Yagel Yaniv, residents of the Har Bracha settlement, on the road running through Huwarah. Several hours later, Davidi Ben Zion, deputy head of the Samaria Regional Council, posted on his private account: "The village of Huwarah must be erased today." Minister Bezalel Smotrich endorsed the statement and declared: "The village of Huwarah must be erased [...] the state is the one that should erase Huwarah." A few hours after Ben Zion posted the message, hundreds of settlers accompanied by soldiers descended on several neighborhoods in Huwarah, as well as the villages of Za'tara, Burin and 'Asirah al-Qibliyah. For roughly five hours, the attackers fired live ammunition at residents, killed 36-year-old Sameh Aqtash, set fire to doorways, trapping families inside, burned four houses to the ground, torched dozens of cars and caused extensive damage to property and businesses. When residents came out of their homes and tried to defend themselves, soldiers attacked them with tear gas; 240 people were injured by tear-gas inhalation.

'Ammar Dmeidi, 36, a father of four, heard about the shooting of the Yaniv brothers and left his job in Nablus to try to get home to Huwarah, fearing the military would close the entrances to the town before he could reach his family. His brother and father were in the car with him. On the way, soldiers stopped them at a flying checkpoint they had set up on the road. 'Ammar and his brother 'Udai got out and began walking home. Their father, who has an amputated leg, drove on, hoping to enter the town through another entrance. Dmeidi told B'Tselem:

> **"when I got closer, I saw more than ten settlers throwing stones at the house. There were about 200 settlers in the entire area. I didn't know how to get into the house without going through the settlers and getting hurt. I went around and knocked on the back door, but no one opened it for me, probably out of fear. I heard my wife open the door, and I went to her. My kids were hysterical. They were crying, terrified. My wife was crying too. I tried to calm them down, and then I went with 'Udai over to my parents' house to see how my mother, Jamileh (60), and my grandmother, Fatimah (90), were doing. My grandmother was in the middle of an epileptic seizure. She was lying on the floor, convulsing, and my mother was very confused and didn't understand what was going on around her. Meanwhile, the settlers returned and threw stones again. About 25 settlers entered the**

> yard. I saw smoke rising from the rec room in the yard. I shouted to the soldiers in the jeeps that the house was on fire, and one of them ordered me to go inside. I told him: Look what the settlers are doing. He told me: Go inside, or I'll shoot you. He pointed a gun at me. We are still shocked by what happened here. My wife and children went to her parents' house in Nablus, and it's been a week now. They tried coming back twice, but each time my five-year-old daughter Larin refused to sleep in her room and told me she didn't want to die." Full testimony

In the weeks after the incident, the Huwarah pogrom drew condemnations from public officials across the political spectrum and even from senior security officials. The criticism focused mainly on the fact that civilians had carried out the attack, rather than on what had been done to Huwarah's residents. Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Herzog denounced the attack and called on settlers "not to take the law into their own hands." Netanyahu and Herzog, like many others who commented on the pogrom, did not condemn the fact that Huwarah residents were brutally attacked, that homes were set on fire with people inside, that property was destroyed or that a Palestinian resident was killed. They also disregarded the fact that soldiers were present throughout the incident, did not stop the pogrom and, in many cases, assisted settlers and took part in attacks on Palestinian residents.

Addressing the settlers, Netanyahu added that "in recent weeks they [the soldiers] eliminated dozens of terrorists," referring to the deadly raids the military had carried out in the preceding weeks in Jenin and Nablus. At least 25 people were killed in those raids, including at least five children, and more than 120 others were injured. Some were unarmed civilians and posed no threat to Israeli forces. According to a B'Tselem investigation, during the invasion of Jenin on 26 January 2023, soldiers shot and killed a man standing near stone throwers, a passerby riding a motorcycle, and a 60-year-old woman who opened the window of her home after finishing her morning prayer; she was shot in the neck in front of her daughters, who were beside her.

As early as 2022, months before the Huwarah pogrom, organized attacks on Huwarah residents had become especially frequent and brutal. Most of the attacks documented during that period were carried out by settlers and soldiers acting together. In the weeks

after the February 2023 pogrom, as public attention faded, this violence remained part of daily life for Huwarah residents. Just days after the pogrom, four settlers, some masked and armed with an axe, invaded the town. They attacked a supermarket and a nearby car carrying a family with a two-year-old girl, smashed the car windows, sprayed pepper spray inside and injured the girl's grandfather in the head with stones. When the family managed to escape, an Israeli civilian chased them in a car and fired at them. Three weeks later, after Palestinians in a passing car fired at soldiers stationed at a military post in the area, dozens of settlers escorted by soldiers invaded the town, some masked and armed with handguns, M-16 rifles and clubs. For more than an hour, they attacked pedestrians and motorists, vandalized businesses and pepper-sprayed residents. Two months later, in June 2023, dozens of settlers and soldiers again invaded the town, attacked homes and torched a car. When residents came out to extinguish the fire, soldiers fired tear-gas canisters at them. Some residents were injured by tear-gas inhalation. The soldiers then fired tear-gas canisters at an ambulance that arrived to help the injured, causing it to catch fire.

In many respects, the Huwarah pogrom was an extension of an existing pattern of violence. Residents' testimonies, however, indicate that it marked a new level of organizational complexity, coordination and division of labor, both between settler militias and their leadership and between settlers and official state bodies. 'Udai Dmeidi described this in an interview with Local Call: "The settlers divided up the work among themselves: one group for smashing, another group for setting fires. No one intervened." As Dmeidi's account suggests, in similar attacks after the Huwarah pogrom, organized settler groups operated under a semi-military command hierarchy. In public WhatsApp and Telegram groups such as "Anash News" and "Hilltop News," large groups of settlers began planning and organizing mass attacks in advance. In "Hilltop News," for example, a call to "erase Huwarah now" was circulated in February and March 2023, followed by massive pogroms against the village's residents.

October 2023 Onward: Blurring the Distinction Between Agents of Violence

Instigating Friction as a Strategy

In March 2026, an Israeli podcast published an interview with Elisha Yered, a resident of the Ramat Migron outpost and one of the most prominent spokespeople for the "Hilltop Youth" and the farm outpost enterprise in the West Bank, who was himself arrested as a suspect in the killing of a Palestinian in the village of Burqah in August 2023 but ultimately not charged for participating in the incident. In the interview, Yered laid out his strategic vision for Israeli takeover of land in the West Bank through "creating friction" with Palestinian residents: "We absolutely initiate friction, and we're proud of it. The IDF is initiating friction too now, after years of not doing it. In the end, when you come to take control of land that an Arab has nationalist aspirations for… most of the time he won't accept it submissively. Though given the historic developments unfolding here, they're accepting it very submissively."

About two months later, GOC Central Command Avi Bluth echoed Yered's words: "What's my advantage? That I'm constantly touching him [the Palestinian], I'm constantly turning the villages into sites of confrontation. We killed 1,500 terrorists in three years. So how come there's no intifada? Why aren't they taking to the streets, why is the Palestinian public apathetic? Why are there no disturbances? Because 96% of the 1,500 killed were involved in terrorism […] We're killing like we haven't killed since 1967."

Elsewhere in the interview, Yered rejected the idea that violence against Palestinians in the West Bank is carried out by a small group of "Hilltop Youth." To make his point, he referred to the settler "reprisal actions" against Palestinians following the killing of Binyamin Ahimeir, a 14-year-old resident of the Malachei Hashalom outpost, by a young Palestinian in April 2024: "[After they found his body] almost a thousand people went into both the village of Duma and the village of al-Mughayir, another village of murderers nearby, and set those villages on fire. […] Not Hilltop Youth […] adults, people with families, combat soldiers who did reserve duty in the war."

According to media reports, on the morning those "reprisal actions" began, Yered wrote a message that was circulated in various settler groups. It called on settlers to encircle

Palestinian villages in the area, conduct "house-to-house searches" and impose "collective punishment on the murderous Arab population," along with a list of meeting points. Several hours later, a similar message circulated in the same groups, this time with a fire emoji next to each meeting point. Group members responded with calls to "destroy the animals" and "burn Duma." Hours later, and for two full days, hundreds of settlers and Israeli soldiers invaded villages in the area, set homes on fire, fired in all directions, killed 25-year-old Jihad Abu 'Alia and injured many others. About 80 olive trees were cut down. Nidal Abu 'Alia, 36, a resident of al-Mughayir, described it to B'Tselem:

> "The settlers attacked us from four directions with stones and live shots. We tried to fight them off with stones and shelter behind the roof's railing. The bullets and stones hit the windows and walls. People who were with us started getting hurt. Rasmi Abu 'Alia (55) was the first – he was hit by a bullet fragment in the hand and a stone in the head. Then Muamen (20), 'Abd a-Latif's son, was hit in the head by a stone. The attack was so savage and violent, it's hard to describe. We didn't know if we'd make it out alive. We kept calling everyone we could for help, but no one could come, because the army had surrounded the area and blocked access." Full testimony

"Let's fast-forward six months," Yered tells the interviewer, turning to "a very similar incident":

> "A terrorist comes, this time not from Duma but from al-Mughayir [...]. The incident ends in a miracle, but it has a triggering potential, bringing up memories of the Binyamin Ahimeir incident. And what do you expect to happen at a moment like that? That they [the settlers] will come down again and say, 'We're not willing to take this,' because their blood was boiling [...]. And what happened right then, literally within an hour, was that, with a push from the head of the council, the defense minister and the GOC, everyone up the chain realized something had to be done. They went into the village of al-Mughayir and, in an unprecedented move, D-9s, loaders and excavators worked there for three days. First, they cleared away 3,500 olive trees [...] partly to remove a danger, but also in

> a way… Bluth said it himself, 'shaping operations.' It's a state 'price tag,' a military 'price tag.' That's what it is. They turned the village upside down, went house to house, arrested dozens, hundreds of people, and arrested the head of the village. They did the job, okay? What had to be done. […] They turned the village upside down and said, 'al-Mughayir will be the model.' […] Even the last of the Hilltop Youth sat there applauding Bluth. Not a single stone was thrown, and not a single vehicle was burned by civilians. Why? Because people felt, wow, there's someone looking after their security."

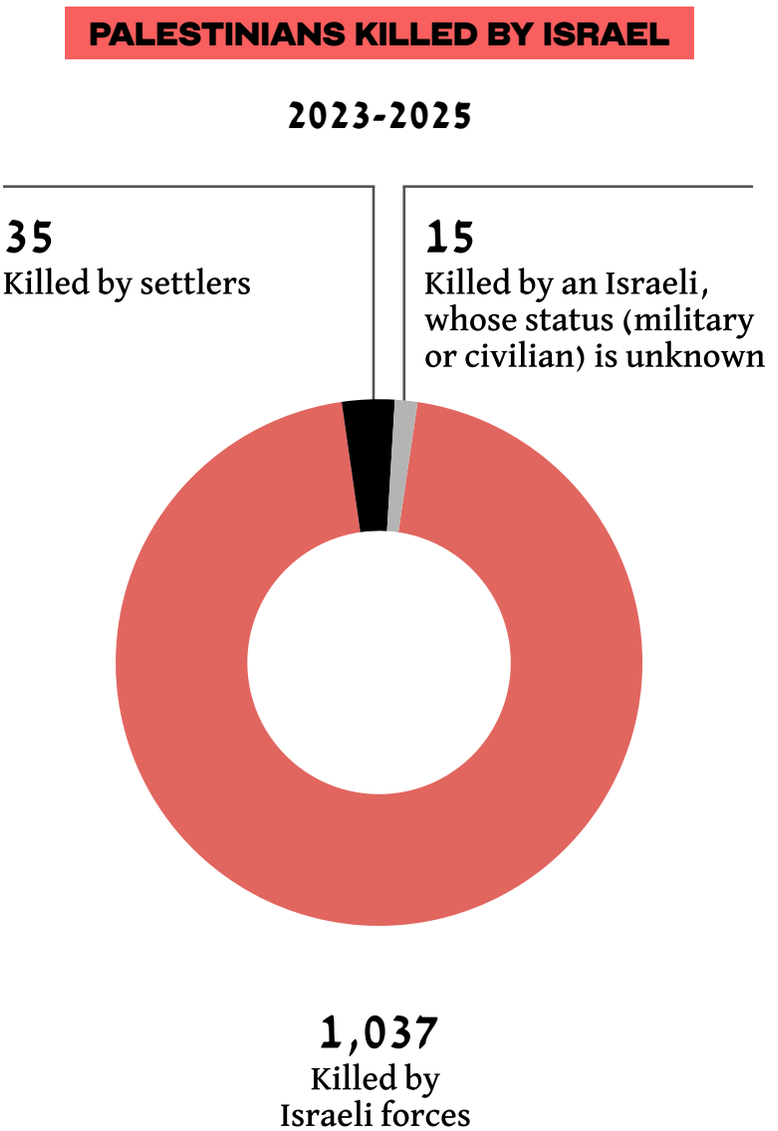
In the August 2025 incident Yered described, hundreds of soldiers raided the village of al-Mughayir in Ramallah District, went house to house, caused extensive destruction and looted money and jewelry, threw stones at cars, launched stun grenades and carried out mass arrests. Soldiers spray-painted Stars of David on several residents' homes. A curfew was imposed on the village for about 70 hours, and for part of that time residents were prohibited even from leaving their homes. On the orders of GOC Central Command Avi Bluth, thousands of trees, a primary source of livelihood for some village residents, were uprooted, most by settlers using private bulldozers, and some by military bulldozers. Bluth then arrived at the scene and declared: "We are going after this village now […] so that everyone is deterred. And not only this village, by the way, but every village that tries to raise a hand against any of the residents."

Throughout 2025, OCHA documented more than 40 settler attacks on al-Mughayir. From the beginning of 2026 through May of that year, the organization documented 17 attacks in the village, an average of about five a month. These attacks caused numerous physical and psychological injuries and extensive damage to property and land, including the burning and vandalizing of farmland, uprooting of olive trees and killing of livestock. According to B'Tselem figures, from the beginning of 2025 through the end of May 2026, five village residents were fatally shot by soldiers and settlers.

The pattern of violence described in al-Mughayir recurs, at varying levels of intensity, in residential areas across the West Bank. From the beginning of the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip in October 2023 through the end of 2023, OCHA documented 370 incidents in which Palestinian West Bank residents were injured or their property was damaged

as a result of settler violence. This figure, likely a significant underestimate given it is impossible to track every instance of harassment, threats, abuse and attacks taking place daily throughout the West Bank, represents almost one third of all incidents of settler violence the organization documented in the West Bank during 2023. In 2024, the organization documented the highest number of attacks since it began tracking settler violence about two decades earlier: more than 1,400 incidents, an average of about four attacks a day. In 2025, the violence continued to expand, with OCHA documenting more than 1,800 incidents of settler violence resulting in Palestinians suffering bodily injuries or property damage in more than 280 villages and towns throughout the West Bank, an average of about five attacks a day. The first half of 2026 saw another escalation: from January through the end of June, OCHA documented more than 1,200 attacks in more than 240 villages and towns, an average of about six attacks a day.

As the number of attacks rose, so too did the number of people injured. In the first quarter of 2026, about 360 Palestinians were injured in settler attacks, nearly four people a day, and roughly as many as were injured in the entire year in both 2023 and 2024. In March 2026 alone, about 170 Palestinians were injured in the West Bank. According to B'Tselem figures, from 7 October 2023 through the end of March 2026, 30 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank by Israeli civilians. Another 14 were killed by Israelis whose status as soldiers or civilians B'Tselem's investigation could not determine with certainty. Four of those killed were children and teenagers.



Regional Defense Battalions

Since October 2023, the Israeli military has recruited thousands of settlers into Regional Defense Battalions for service in the areas where they live, some with a long history of criminal violence against local Palestinians. Palestinian residents therefore often recognize these settler-soldiers during attacks even when they are in uniform. Countless testimonies have since detailed people in uniform participating in attacks on Palestinians. In the first six months after 7 October alone, OCHA documented more than 700 settler attacks, with attackers in uniform participating in almost half of them.

During this period, B'Tselem documented settlers assuming more and more "military" powers: stopping Palestinian residents and demanding papers, demolishing structures, imposing curfews on villages and freely entering Palestinian homes. In many cases, settlers effectively instruct military forces, ordering arrests and even live fire. For example, on 25 June 2025, dozens of masked settlers invaded Kafr Malik, most armed with clubs and one with a handgun. They attacked residents with stones, set homes and vehicles on fire and spray-painted hate slogans. Three soldiers standing with the settlers on a road south of the village began firing tear-gas canisters and live rounds, first into the air and then at young men from the village. The settlers continued throwing stones at the young men, who also threw stones back. About two minutes later, a vehicle arrived, and three more soldiers got out. They split into two groups, one of which was joined by a civilian, and chased the young men while firing at them until they reached the village homes. Three young Palestinians were killed by the gunfire. A witness who asked to remain anonymous told a B'Tselem field researcher:

> "The settlers took advantage of the fact that the soldiers were firing tear gas at us to slowly advance back toward the village. The young men confronted them and tried to stop them from reentering, and then the soldiers started firing live rounds at the youths and wounded Lutfi Tarshan, 18, who was in the olive groves facing the military vehicle that had dropped off the soldiers. The three soldiers who got out of the vehicle opened heavy live fire at anything moving in front of them [...]. When the soldiers and the settler reached Rami Hamayel's house, near Khaldiyah's house, I saw the settler pointing people out to them. The two soldiers shot at everyone the settler indicated. There was so much gunfire in the area that I fled behind Murshid Hamayel's house. [I] found Murshid lying face down on the ground, in a pool of blood. I started yelling and turned him over onto his back. I didn't see any signs of life. I began shouting loudly. Then I sent a message to the village residents' group that Murshid had been wounded. At that moment, two soldiers approached me from the west. They pointed their rifles at me and shouted in Hebrew. They stood over me for about three or four minutes, all the while aiming their rifles at my head as I sat next to Murshid." Full testimony

In addition to recruiting settlers into Regional Defense Battalions, thousands more settlers have joined settlement security squads in settlements and outposts since October 2023. These squads receive training and equipment from the Israeli military, and many members have also been called up for reserve duty and authorized to wear uniforms in that capacity. Settlement security coordinators, who command the security squads, are formally vested by the state with authority equivalent to that of police officers, allowing them to stop and search Palestinians and even detain them. Formally, these powers are limited to the settlement and its immediate vicinity, but in many cases, security coordinators exercise them outside those areas. Settlement security coordinators are also in charge of distributing military firearms to residents of their settlements, including those who are not members of the security squads. This gray area compounds the ambiguity, leaving West Bank residents unable to determine whether armed settlers are acting with authority and in an official capacity. Like Regional Defense Battalions soldiers, some members of the security squads also have a history of violence against Palestinian West Bank residents.

Under a temporary order adopted after October 2023, the government lowered the bar for carrying firearms, and government representatives publicly encouraged all Israeli citizens, including those living in the West Bank, to arm themselves in masse. The Ministry of National Security, headed by Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, then distributed thousands of firearms to members of settlement security squads and other settlers living in settlements and outposts throughout the West Bank. Hundreds more firearms were purchased and distributed by regional councils, including sniper rifles. According to a report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a U.S.-based NGO that documents violent conflicts, the number of violent incidents involving armed settlers with no reported or visible connection to the military or the settlement security squads increased more than sevenfold during the final quarter of 2023. In addition to firearms, the state allocated resources for "security components," including ATVs, cameras and electric gates for outposts and farm outposts. At the same time, the Ministry of Settlements and National Missions began distributing large numbers of drones to settlers. Since then, settlers have been documented flying drones over orchards and grazing fields to monitor the movements of Palestinian farmers and shepherds, threaten and frighten them. This equipment enables settlers to tighten their control over the space and facilitates the expulsion of those farmers from their land.

In many cases, children and teenagers from settlements play a leading role in the expulsion of Palestinian communities. Since October 2023, these young settlers have been documented plowing privately owned Palestinian land, destroying water and electricity infrastructure, looting and destroying private property, entering homes, beating and harassing residents, at times while armed with knives or other bladed weapons. In other cases, adult settlers accompany them. A recurring division of labor emerges between adults and youth: children and teenagers are sent to wear communities down over time, with armed adults then arriving to "finish the job" and bring about the community's final expulsion.

Attacking in Full View of the Cameras

One feature of Israeli violence in the West Bank post-October 2023 is a shift from bureaucratic violence, or violence paired with denial and concealment, to violence committed openly and in full view of the cameras. In July 2026, an Israeli police officer was filmed throwing a stun grenade into a Palestinian vehicle in Qalandia Refugee Camp and leaning against the car door to prevent the occupants from getting out until the grenade exploded. Similarly, violence by soldiers and settlers is frequently documented, and the perpetrators themselves often record their actions, post the footage on social media and brag about it in real time. These recordings mark a new level of impunity for Israeli attackers in the West Bank: now, even when unjustified lethal violence by soldiers or settlers is documented and published in real time, and even when the perpetrators' identities are known to everyone, the Israeli law-enforcement system not only fails to hold them accountable for their actions but openly grants them impunity without any attempt to conceal it (for more on the legal implications of overt impunity and the normalization of violence since October 2023, see chapter "Legal Implications of the Elimination Project in the West Bank").

A prominent example occurred on 28 July 2025, when settlers carried out earthworks on land next to the village of Um al-Kheir in the South Hebron Hills to prepare the ground for a new outpost. Among them was Yinon Levi, an earthworks contractor who established the Meitarim Farm outpost near the community of Kh. Zanutah in Masafer Yatta and played a central role in the expulsion of that community in 2023. In the afternoon, after most of the settlers had left the area, the excavator operator who had taken part in the work began driving back toward the settlement through a fenced olive grove belonging to village residents, damaging the trees and the fence around the grove. Several young

village residents gathered nearby to try to block his way and threw stones at the excavator. In response, the driver struck one of the young men, 29-year-old Ahmad al-Hathaleen, in the head with the excavator bucket. He fell and lost consciousness.

Immediately afterward, Yinon Levi arrived and began waving his handgun at the young men. Village resident Awdah al-Hathaleen, a human rights activist and B'Tselem volunteer, was standing at the village community center, about 40 meters from Levi, filming what was happening. In footage filmed by Awdah that circulated widely on social media and in media outlets around the world, Levi can be seen aiming his gun and shooting Awdah. Awdah was killed at the scene. His mother, 74-year-old Khadrah al-Hathaleen, said in testimony to B'Tselem:

> "I found Awdah lying in a pool of blood, writhing in pain. [...] The young men carried Awdah about 60 meters on foot to the settlement gate. [...] The soldiers attacked us, pushing and hitting us. When I shouted at the settler who shot Awdah [Yinon Levy], "Why did you kill my son?" he punched me twice and knocked me to the ground. [...] After the ambulance left [Israeli ambulance that took Awdah], the soldiers violently pushed me and the other residents into our yard, where there were about 30 children ranging in age from a few months to 13 years old. The soldiers threw two stun grenades into the yard. [...] We gathered the children and took them into a room to protect them. Then one soldier locked them inside. The soldiers put me and several other women in another room and locked us in. I stood by the window and shouted at the soldiers, and then one of them sealed it with bricks. [...] There was chaos, with the locked children screaming and crying, and women and men assaulted by the soldiers in the yard and screaming. After we were locked in the room for about two hours, the soldiers left the house, taking the keys with them. We managed to get out through a back window. We broke open the door of the room the children were in. They were crying and trembling with fear, drenched in sweat. [...] At around 8:00 P.M., we were informed that Awdah had died of his wounds at Soroka Hospital in Be'er Sheva. The settlers and the excavator left, but the soldiers remained in the village. I broke down." Full testimony

After the shooting, Israeli forces arrested five members of al-Hathaleen's family. In the week after the killing, military and police forces continued to invade the village every night and arrested 14 more residents. At the same time, the police refused to return al-Hathaleen's body to his family for burial unless they agreed to restrictions on the funeral. Awdah's body was returned only about a week and a half after his killing.

Levi himself was arrested on the evening of the incident, held overnight and released the next day to house arrest on the grounds of insufficient evidence, after an Israeli court accepted his claim of self-defense. Later that week, he was released from house arrest as well, and in the days that followed he was already seen carrying out earthworks near the al-Hathaleen family's homes in Um al-Kheir. In early August 2026, a year after the documented killing, the State Attorney's Office filed an indictment against Levi on charges of reckless homicide, trespassing while carrying a weapon and malicious damage. Levi's indictment is highly exceptional given the thousands of documented attacks in which none of those involved were prosecuted.

A Routine of Intimidation

Between raids on Palestinian communities, arrests and home invasions, different agents of violence maintain a constant presence in Palestinian living spaces. At any given time, military forces move through the streets of villages, cities and towns throughout the West Bank, enter businesses and community and educational institutions, disrupt Palestinian residents' movement, and conduct training exercises near Palestinian villages or among residents' homes. Settlers, sometimes armed, also move through residential areas and even enter homes to assert their presence on the ground and intimidate residents.

Military Presence

In central Hebron, for example, about 900 settlers live among hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. At any given moment, more than 1,000 soldiers and Border Police officers are stationed where the two populations intersect to maintain the systems of segregation and military control. In addition to suffering daily harassment at the hands of the settler minority living among them, Palestinian residents of Hebron are subjected to incessant violence and humiliation by soldiers and police officers, who are constantly present at dozens of fortified

checkpoints, roadblocks and permanent and temporary guard posts throughout the city. Soldiers stationed in the city also engage in what is known in military jargon as "showing our presence", a practice intended to instill fear in the population through the ubiquitous presence of armed soldiers. A soldier who gave testimony to Breaking the Silence described it this way:

> **"All of Hebron is about making our presence felt. [...] It's meant to disrupt daily life and remind everyone there that you're here, the army is here, the army is everywhere. [...] It's like parting the Red Sea, only with people, all to keep hammering home to residents that you can go out to buy a cucumber and the army will stop you, ask to see your ID, or just get in the middle of your life. People there don't live."**

Show of presence in Hebron is a specific iteration of a practice the Israeli military uses throughout the West Bank. In addition to the permanent presence of armed Israeli forces at checkpoints and on "patrols" along roads and streets, the Israeli military routinely makes its presence felt by invading private homes, usually at night or before dawn. Soldiers, typically in large groups and sometimes masked, pound on doors to wake the sleeping family, or break into the home, causing extensive property damage. During some of these raids, residents are held at gunpoint, sometimes for hours.

As the scale of Israeli violence has increased, the number of military invasions of West Bank residents' homes has risen steadily in recent years. According to OCHA figures, between 7 October 2023 and 18 March 2024, Israeli forces carried out an average of 670 "search and arrest" and other operations each month, almost twice the monthly average in the first nine months of 2023, which stood at 340.

Settlers Making a Show of Presence

Settlers, often armed, also move freely through Palestinian residential areas as a matter of routine, intimidating residents through provocation, harassment, threats and, in many cases, violent attacks. Since October 2023, entire communities have been displaced even without a single "decisive" violent incident, as a result of internalizing the constant risk to life, property and personal safety posed by settlers' presence and the toll of having to live amid an ongoing reality of violence or the threat of violence. Residents' testimonies

indicate that the harassment and attacks continue even after a community has been forced out. As described in detail in the chapter on ethnic cleansing and territorial takeover in this report, settlers and official state mechanisms often pursue expelled families to their new locations to continue making their lives unbearable and drive them out again.

Surveillance, Threats and Extortion

Israel's system of control over movement and access in the West Bank includes a permit regime that also serves it to collect information on Palestinian residents. Since 2005, every Palestinian entering Israel for any purpose has been required to carry a magnetic card containing biometric identifiers such as facial features, fingerprints and palm prints. In recent years, Israel has also operated a network of closed-circuit cameras and other monitoring and surveillance systems, especially in Hebron and East Jerusalem, to collect biometric data and personal information on the entire Palestinian population, including people suspected of nothing. In 2021, Haaretz reported that the military incentivizes soldiers to photograph as many Palestinians as possible to feed the system, and that settlement security coordinators have access to a similar system to identify Palestinians entering settlements for work. The report also described how routine detention, harassment and arrest of Palestinian residents at checkpoints and on the streets often relies on information from these systems, which soldiers access on designated mobile phones.

Over the years, Israeli surveillance of Palestinians has expanded to include large-scale social media monitoring and cell-phone tracking, as well as increased use of drones by the military to collect information. Since 2020, the military has been documented using drones equipped with loudspeakers that broadcast threats over residents' heads, including during demonstrations in the West Bank. That same year, it was reported that the state would fund drones, electronic surveillance equipment and aerial photography for settlement residents, ostensibly for "monitoring Palestinian construction."

Israel routinely leverages the personal information it collects, together with West Bank residents' heavy dependence on Israeli systems, to put pressure on residents and their families, including by threatening to deny basic rights or expose personal information. For example, a 2008 report by Physicians for Human Rights Israel showed how the Shin Bet demanded that dozens of Palestinian patients provide information or become full-fledged

collaborators as a condition for receiving permits to leave Gaza for medical treatment. In 2018, the Shin Bet posted threatening notices on homes and businesses in the village of Beit Ummar in Hebron District. The notices, written in Arabic and signed by a Shin Bet agent known as "Captain Amar," threatened to revoke work permits from families whose children were suspected of throwing stones.

During the events of May 2021 and Operation Guardian of the Walls, the Shin Bet transferred information on Palestinian families from East Jerusalem to the National Insurance Institute, which suspended their entitlement to state-funded healthcare. Almost all the families had their coverage restored after taking legal action. The National Insurance Institute did not specify why it had suspended coverage, but in response to a freedom-of-information petition, it acknowledged receiving information from the Shin Bet on Palestinians enrolled in the national insurance system. Around the same time, the Shin Bet used a cell phone traffic tracking system to send threatening text messages to hundreds of Palestinian citizens of Israel and East Jerusalem residents who were not suspected of any violent activity. The messages read: "You have been identified as someone who took part in violent acts at the al-Aqsa Mosque. We will settle the score."

In recent years, West Bank residents have described receiving threatening phone calls from Shin Bet personnel aimed at deterring them from taking part in political activity. Former prisoners have also described how Shin Bet personnel frequently threaten them before and after their release. For example, in November 2023, after three months in Israeli detention facilities, 18-year-old Muhammad Nazzal, a resident of Qabatiyah, was taken to Ofer Prison ahead of his release. During his months in detention, Nazzal was subjected to severe abuse by soldiers and prison guards: they stripped him naked, photographed him, kicked him and beat him with metal batons. At Ofer Prison, before his release, a Shin Bet officer warned him not to hold celebrations after his release and not to speak to the media: "He said I should keep quiet and threatened that if I didn't meet those conditions, they would arrest me again."

Israeli forces often call residents to tell them that a family member has been killed or injured by the military. These calls usually include a series of threats intended to deter the family from publicly expressing grief over the death of their loved one, holding mourning rituals, setting up a mourning tent or having community members gather at the funeral. In February 2025, for example, 12-year-old Ayman al-Haymuni left his grandfather's home with his 10-year-old brother and headed toward their uncle's adjoining home in

Hebron. According to B'Tselem's investigation, after the two noticed soldiers in the area and turned around to go back to their grandfather's home, al-Haymuni was shot in the back and fell to the ground. His uncle tried to evacuate him, but soldiers who approached fired at him, forcing him to retreat. A few minutes later, after the soldiers left, the family took Ayman to the hospital in a car, where he was pronounced dead.

Ayman's father, Nassar al-Haymuni, 39, a father of four who was out of town when the incident occurred, was detained on his way back at a checkpoint in the city. Border Police officers ordered him out of his car and made him strip at gunpoint. After checking his ID, one of the officers asked how he was related to "the boy we killed." When he replied that the boy was his son, the officer told him: "We will send you to him, God willing." Al-Haymuni was then taken into a room. In testimony to B'Tselem, he said that another officer held a phone to his ear, and a man who introduced himself as a Shin Bet officer spoke to him:

> **"[He] said to me: "May God reward you for your patience," and added: "He was a child, and we're sorry; he was killed by mistake." Then he asked: "Why are you going back to Hebron now?" I answered: "To see my child and bury him," and the officer said: "We're watching you, and if you do anything wrong, I'll come and arrest you at your house." I told him: "Why do it there? Arrest me here now," and he replied: "No, now you go bury your son, and if you do anything, I will arrest you."** Full testimony

Abuse and Dehumanization

Abuse and Torture

In the months after October 2023, Israel carried out indiscriminate mass arrests of Palestinians throughout the territory under its control. In addition to thousands of Gaza residents who were in Israel at the time with permits and were then arrested for illegal presence after Israel summarily revoked those permits, by February 2024 more than 7,000 West Bank residents had also been arrested, according to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club and other organizations. These arrests often involved violence against those taken by the Israeli forces and their families, and sometimes, extensive destruction of their homes and

theft of property. Many were held in administrative detention, without trial and without an opportunity to defend themselves against the allegations.

Information, data and hundreds of testimonies collected by B'Tselem since October 2023 show how Israeli detention facilities have become a network of torture camps. Repeated reports describe an increasingly extreme reality of frequent, severe and arbitrary violence, humiliation and degradation, deliberate starvation, forced unhygienic conditions, sleep deprivation and denial of medical treatment. B'Tselem monitoring has shown that between October 2023 and 30 June 2026, at least 32 detainees and prisoners from the West Bank died as a result of violence, systemic neglect and denial of medical care in Israeli prisons and detention facilities, as did about 52 Palestinians from Gaza and about six Palestinian citizens of Israel, a total of about 90 people.

On the night between 7 and 8 October 2023, Ashraf al-Muhtaseb, 53, a father of five, was arrested at his family's home in Hebron. After his arrest, he was moved from one detention facility or prison to another while being subjected to extreme violence. In testimony to B'Tselem, al-Muhtaseb described what happened at the Etzion detention facility when other detainees were brought in:

> **"They were taken to the yard in front of us, and we watched them being beaten through the window. There were 10 soldiers there. They played loud music in the yard and brutally beat the detainees, who were handcuffed and blindfolded. They punched them, hit them with rifle butts and kicked them. One of the young guys was beaten so badly that his face and mouth bled. It was frightening. I thought they were going to kill them right there in the yard. It lasted half an hour. I've never seen anything like that in prison. You can't begin to imagine the beating those guys took."**

At one point, al-Muhtaseb arrived at Negev Prison (Ketziot):

> **"They led me along for about 500 meters, hitting me hard on the way until I fell down, and then they kicked me in different parts of my body. During the attack, they pulled all my clothes off, including my**

> underwear. I heard them say to each other, "This one is sick," but they kept on hitting me anyway. I felt I was going to pass out. Finally, they ordered me to get dressed. I could hardly pull my clothes on, and the whole time they kept kicking me. My waist really hurt and I could hardly breathe. I couldn't move, let alone walk. I stayed lying on the floor, until three of them pulled and dragged me by my arms. It was terrible, indescribable. I felt near death. While they were dragging me, I saw the blood of other detainees on the floor." Full testimony

The abuse is not confined to prisons. It has also become commonplace on the streets of Palestinian cities and villages in the West Bank. In Hebron, for example, a city where Palestinians have long suffered abuse and harassment, aggression has intensified, as reflected in 25 testimonies collected by B'Tselem field researchers from Palestinians assaulted by soldiers in the city center between May and August 2024. The testimonies describe acts of violence, humiliation and abuse against men, women, teenagers and children. Most were detained entirely at random while passing through checkpoints on their way to work or the grocery store, or while drinking coffee in their own yard. In most cases, the soldiers took the victims to military posts, where most of the abuse took place; in some cases, the attackers filmed the abuse and proudly shared the footage on social media. The victims were not suspected of any offense and were released immediately after the assault, many of them requiring medical attention.

Testimonies given to B'Tselem in the following months indicate that this trend has continued. Soldiers in Hebron still periodically detain residents, look through their phones, drag them to military posts in the city and abuse them, sometimes for hours, before releasing them without charge. Residents who have experienced such abuse often decline to give testimony to B'Tselem, other human rights organizations or the media for fear of retaliation by their attackers. That retaliation may include further abuse or harassment targeting them and their families on roads and at checkpoints.

Torture in Shin Bet Interrogations

In 1999, the High Court of Justice ruled that Shin Bet interrogators have no authority to depart from standard police interrogation methods. Yet information and testimonies collected by B'Tselem in recent years indicate that Shin Bet interrogations still routinely involve psychological and physical abuse, which often includes extreme violence, harsh detention conditions and shackling in stress positions to exert physical and psychological pressure. According to the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, the annual number of complaints submitted to the body in charge of investigating alleged Shin Bet misconduct, which averaged about 66 in the 20 years preceding October 2023, jumped to 119 complaints in a single year (2023-2024). According to figures published by Haaretz, at least six Palestinians died during Shin Bet interrogations between October 2023 and August 2025.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is among the methods of abuse that Israeli prison guards and soldiers employ against Palestinian prisoners. Since October 2023, this abuse has become more violent and more frequent. Testimonies given to B'Tselem recount strip searches, beatings to the genitals, and genital mutilation using objects, dogs, batons and sharp instruments. In September 2025, Save the Children published a survey of children aged 12-17 who had been held in Israeli detention after October 2023; more than half reported that they had experienced or witnessed sexual violence. Save the Children estimated that the actual figure was higher still, given how difficult it is for survivors to speak about their experiences and the social stigma attached to sexual abuse.

In a report submitted by the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2025, the Commission found that sexual violence had become one of Israel's "standard operating procedures" and "major element in the ill-treatment of Palestinians." According to the Commission, the nature and frequency of these abuses have intensified since October 2023. It found that Israel routinely uses checkpoint harassment, the disclosure of information about individuals' sexual behavior or orientation, the publication of intimate images and online threats against Palestinians to pressure, repress and intimidate Palestinian women, men and

boys. Other reports described how soldiers staffing checkpoints throughout the West Bank take photos of Palestinian women, make degrading comments about their appearance, direct curses and obscenities at them and, at times, flash them.

The UN Commission of Inquiry's report, together with testimonies collected by B'Tselem field researchers and news reports published during the period under review, describes how soldiers and settlers across the West Bank use sexual violence, including forced stripping, photographing people naked, threats of rape and attacks on genitals, to punish, intimidate and expel Palestinian residents.

For example, on 13 March 2026, at around 1:00 A.M., dozens of settlers, most of them masked, broke into the residents' living quarters in Khirbet Humsah in the Jordan Valley. They woke the residents, tied up women and children, gathered them inside the tent, threw them to the ground, throw water on them, and beat them, including with sticks and clubs. It was later reported that during the attack settlers stripped one of the men of all his clothes in front of foreign solidarity activists who were there, tightened a handcuff around his penis, and dragged him naked for about 100 meters into the tent where everyone was gathered, including the women and children and the foreign activists, who were also attacked. One woman from the community told Haaretz that while she was handcuffed, "the settler threatened that they would come back tomorrow and take my daughters, and that they would live with them, with the settlers. Then he grabbed my oldest daughter, who's 14, and started slapping her. I couldn't do anything to protect her while I was handcuffed and bent over."

Desecration of Bodies

Over the course of two and a half years of genocide in the Gaza Strip, Israeli forces have been extensively documented desecrating the bodies of Palestinians: running them over with military vehicles, scooping them up and burying them in the ground with bulldozers, among other acts. This phenomenon has also become common in the West Bank.

During a raid on Tulkarm Refugee Camp in July 2024, five camp residents were killed. A military bulldozer scooped the bodies of three of them into its bucket and carried them away, covered in dirt and pieces of rubble. Two months later, in September 2024, a video

posted on social media showed a group of soldiers throwing the bodies of four Palestinians from a rooftop. They had been killed in exchanges of fire with military forces that invaded the town of Qabatiyah in Jenin District. Another video showed a military bulldozer scooping the bodies from the scene into its bucket. In May 2026, about an hour after the funeral of a resident of the village of al-'Asa'asah, settlers tried to dig up the grave and remove the freshly buried remains. The deceased's relatives heard the settlers shouting that they had to "get the body the hell out of the grave." Village residents who came to the scene were forced to remove the body themselves and take it for burial in a nearby village under the watchful eye of settlers and soldiers.

The desecration and mutilation of Palestinian bodies compound Israel's longstanding policy of seizing and withholding the bodies of slain Palestinians, sometimes to use as bargaining chips in the future. This practice gravely violates the principle of respect for the dead and denies families their basic right to pay final respects to their loved ones and give them a proper, dignified burial. Since October 2023, B'Tselem has investigated and documented dozens of incidents in which Israeli soldiers prevented the evacuation of bodies for burial, seized bodies, including those of children, or prevented families from accessing their relatives' bodies, usually as part of the military's frequent raids on refugee camps and cities in the northern West Bank. According to figures from the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC) provided to B'Tselem, as of the end of June 2026, Israel was holding the bodies of 794 Palestinians from the West Bank, East Jerusalem, or Israel, including 82 children and teenagers and ten women. Parents of children shot by soldiers have repeatedly described to B'Tselem how being denied access to their child's body leaves them unable to come to terms with the death.

Abuse by the military and settlers often continues even after the body is returned, through restrictions on the number of participants at funerals and even attacks on civilians during the funerals themselves. On 11 October 2023, for example, masked settlers shot and killed three Palestinians in the village of Qusrah; a fourth was killed by soldiers' gunfire that same evening. According to a Haaretz report, the next morning, a group of settlers, including Samaria Regional Council head Yossi Dagan, called for blocking the ambulances carrying the bodies from reaching the funerals. Dozens of settlers responded, went to the entrance of the village of a-Sawiyah, through which the ambulances were passing, and fired at them in front of military and police forces. Two Palestinians, a father and son, were killed.

The Effects of Violence: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Other Forms of Mental Distress

For many Palestinian communities in the West Bank, the escalating violence of military raids has turned life into a nightmare with no end in sight. In March 2025, Médecins Sans Frontières described how tens of thousands of displaced people from cities and refugee camps in the northern West Bank, some of whom had lived through the bombings, widespread killing and immense destruction carried out by the military in their residential areas, remain without adequate shelter, essential services or access to medical care. According to information collected by the organization, most suffer from ongoing stress and display pronounced symptoms of anxiety and depression. A similar picture also emerges from accounts by residents who remained in the areas where the raids took place, included in a report published by the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory in June 2026. For example, the brother of 23-year-old Adam Bsharat, who was killed in an Israeli drone strike during a raid on the town of Tammun in January 2025 together with two of his cousins, 10-year-old Hamzah and eight-year-old Rida, told the Commission how his family has to pass through the yard beside their home where the children used to play and where Adam, Hamzah and Rida were killed every day. Adam's brother told the Commission that since the incident, they no longer feel safe playing outside.

'Atef Jamil Hanani, 56, a father of four, and his 17-year-old son Jamil, from Beit Furik in Nablus District, decided to work inside Israel after a long period of unemployment and economic hardship, even though they had not received the required permits from the Israeli authorities. On their second day in Tira, police raided the apartment where they were sleeping and arrested them. Jamil was incarcerated for 25 days and 'Atef for two months. When 'Atef was released, his wife told him that Jamil had lost a great deal of weight. "Afterward, he told me that they beat him, and that in the minors' ward in Hadarim Prison, during roll call, they made them lie on the ground and forced them to howl. On the day he was released from prison, they beat him and pepper-sprayed him. His mother told me that when he came out of detention, he was very thin," 'Atef said in testimony to B'Tselem.

In November 2025, after 'Atef and Jamil had been released, a group of soldiers raided Beit Furik. A soldier got out of one of the jeeps, threw a stun grenade toward young people who were throwing stones, then turned and fired at Jamil and his friends, who were standing on the street corner. Jamil was wounded in the abdomen. After an ambulance took him to

a clinic on the other side of the road, soldiers raided the clinic. A few minutes after they left, Jamil was taken to a hospital in Nablus, where he died of his wounds.

In testimony to B'Tselem, Atef described life after his son's killing:

> "[the soldiers] just did a short patrol in the town's streets, which ended with the killing of an innocent child, and then left right after. It's as if they go out hunting, only they're hunting human beings. To them, we're nothing. [...] Since he died, our lives have changed. Every time I look at the children's room, I feel that something is missing. Where is Jamil? How was he snatched from us, from his siblings? [...] My children cry all the time, and when they see their mother crying, they leave the house, especially his brother Muhammad, 16, who was close to him in age, and they were good friends and spent a lot of time together.
>
> In the meantime, the month of Ramadan and 'Eid al-Fitr have passed without him, and that was very hard. Every time I remember Jamil and the way he left us, I lose my mind, and when I see his bed empty while his brothers sleep in their beds, the pain clenches me. We go to visit him at the cemetery almost every day. I can't be far from him, and I feel like my legs take me there without thinking.
>
> [...] I keep asking myself: Why are our children not like the rest of the children in the world? Why do they go through these tough experiences? Why are they forced to go through military checkpoints and be subjected to abuse everywhere, on the roads, in the streets and in the neighborhoods? And even inside their homes, they're not safe. At any moment, a soldier could break down your front door, drag you and your children out of your beds and abuse you. You don't feel safe anywhere; instead, you're under constant threat, and you feel helpless, unable to protect your children." Full testimony

The ordeal of arrest, abuse and torture in detention facilities takes a heavy psychological toll not only on detainees and prisoners themselves but also on their families and those closest to them. The pattern of arbitrary arrests, often in nighttime raids on family homes, is generally only the beginning of a long ordeal of fear and uncertainty. For weeks, months and sometimes years after the arrest, family members know nothing about what has happened to their loved ones, whether they have been injured, where they are being held or when they will return. Often, when their loved one is released, family members find they have lost weight, that their health and vitality have deteriorated, and that they are suffering from lasting physical and psychological harm. In many cases, the burden of care and rehabilitation falls on the family, even as they themselves continue to live under the pressure of military and settler raids, arrests and violence, and sometimes with added fear of harassment because of their family member's arrest.

The constant fear of combined settler and military attacks has also become an inseparable part of daily life for many West Bank residents, especially in Area C and rural Palestinian communities. In August 2024, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), one of the main providers of health services in the West Bank, reported a 91% increase in the number of Hebron District residents needing psychological first aid in the month following October 2023 compared with the preceding month. The jump was attributed to the sharp rise in settler and military violence in the area. MSF also described how young children, who struggle to understand what is happening around them when soldiers and settlers invade their homes and must watch their parents' helplessness as the boundaries of their home and their sense of security are violated, become primary victims.

The psychological impact of this reality was well documented even before October 2023. A few months after the expulsion of the 'Ein Samia community in May 2023, its residents told Physicians for Human Rights Israel how fear of repeated nighttime settler attacks had kept them in a state of constant vigilance, completely disrupting their sleep patterns. Parents who spoke with the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory reported that after hearing about settler and military attacks in their area, witnessing an attack or experiencing one themselves, their children were too afraid to leave the house, suffered from recurring nightmares, refused to walk by military checkpoints and settlements to get to school, and became aggressive or withdrawn. A father whose two children, both under five, were abducted from their home by armed settlers and tied to a tree told the Commission that since the incident, his children had

stopped going outside to play and begun suffering from recurring nightmares, and that their cousins, who witnessed the incident, have also been afraid to leave their homes ever since.

The reality these parents are describing goes beyond the traumatic impact of a single incident: it is the cumulative outcome of a life lived in relentless, non-stop fear of violence. For Palestinian men, women and children in the West Bank, fear, insecurity and loss have become interwoven into their daily lives. In addition to their own experiences, they carry the effects of traumas experienced by parents and other family members under the occupation. Testimonies given to B'Tselem and other organizations indicate that Palestinian parents often struggle to protect their children from this psychological burden, in part because they themselves are coping with similar distress.

B. MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

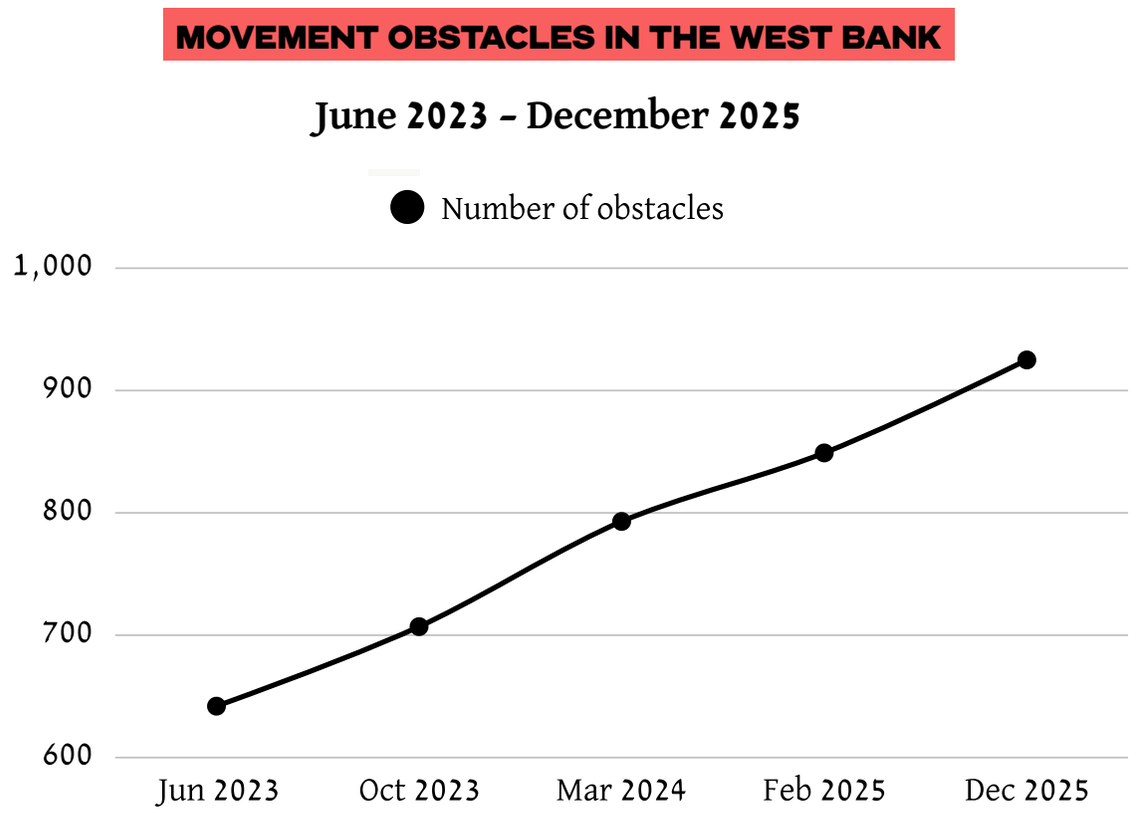
Introduction

Over the years, the Israeli regime has developed an extensive system of movement restrictions across the West Bank, allowing it to bring Palestinian movement and daily life to a halt at a moment's notice. A Palestinian leaving home for work, school, a family gathering, a medical appointment, or any other purpose cannot know how long the journey will take or whether they will reach their destination at all. The sheer number and variety of closures, together with the arbitrary opening and closing of roads, create a permanent state of chaos that deprives millions of Palestinians of the basic ability to plan their day. Beyond the perimeter checkpoints separating the West Bank from areas within the Green Line, East Jerusalem, and Jordan, the West Bank itself is crisscrossed by many checkpoints and obstacles that prevent continuous travel for Palestinians: iron barriers, earth mounds, boulders, concrete blocks, observation towers, flying checkpoints (temporary military checkpoints), gates, and spike strips. Together, they form a bureaucratic system that subordinates Palestinians to Israel by fragmenting space and controlling movement within it.

Since October 2023, Israel has used this infrastructure to tighten its control over Palestinians' daily lives. It has added more than 200 checkpoints, blocking access from dozens of Palestinian communities to main roads, and revoked all permits allowing Palestinians to enter Israel. Settlers' involvement in road blockages serves as a parallel mechanism of direct control over movement. The growing violence of settler militias and their presence around and inside Palestinian villages across the West Bank compound the military's restrictions on Palestinian movement. Settler involvement takes two main forms: it may be "organized," through the reserve forces and Regional Defense Battalions that incorporate settlers living in the West Bank into Israel's official army forces, or "spontaneous," carried out by individuals or by groups of settler militias who block roads on their own initiative, often using violence. The combination of official bureaucracy and spontaneous violence heightens the uncertainty and arbitrariness at the core of the system of movement restrictions.

Data published in April 2026 by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) illustrate the scale of these restrictions: as of the end of 2025, OCHA had

documented 925 movement obstacles across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Hebron. This figure does not include checkpoints controlling movement out of the West Bank or closures imposed on entire areas. Gates and checkpoints on roads made up 60% of the obstacles sampled by OCHA, the largest category. The number documented at the end of 2025 was 43% higher than the annual average for the previous 20 years. According to OCHA data, approximately 700 movement obstacles were in place across the West Bank in October 2023, and approximately 220 more had been added by the end of 2025. B'Tselem's count identified 203 checkpoints and roadblocks added since October 2023, all documented and verified by B'Tselem field researchers. The difference between the figures stems from B'Tselem's ability to document and count only certain types of obstacles, as explained in the data published on our website. A similar survey by the Palestinian Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission in July 2025 recorded 911 roadblocks and obstacles, including 80 installed since the beginning of 2025.



*The figures cover manned checkpoints, permanent gates,earth mounds and other types of obstacles

Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

The modest differences among the organizations' figures reflect more than differences in methodology. They also stem from the sheer number of closures, their wide distribution and chaotic nature, and the fact that the total can change from one day to the next. Any attempt to itemize or catalog the various restrictions inevitably falls short of a reality defined by uncertainty, arbitrariness, and vulnerability. The obstacles are many and varied, and may include gates that remain locked or are opened and closed intermittently; checkpoints staffed around the clock or only in specific hours; remotely operated checkpoints; concrete blocks and earth mounds; and trenches or barbed-wire fences installed by the military or, at times, informally by settlers, then left in place indefinitely. Uncertainty over whether movement through a given area will be possible enables Israel to control the population it has subjected to its rule and manage Palestinian life.

Historical Foundations of Movement Restriction

Until 1991, a general entry permit allowed West Bank Palestinians to enter areas within the Green Line. This permit was granted to all residents except a small group classified by Israel as a "security risk." The permit policy served Israel's need to exploit Palestinian workers as a cheap and readily available labor force for the growth of its economy, making Palestinians deeply dependent on the Israeli economy (for further discussion, see the chapter "Economic Strangulation" in this report). At the same time, Israel restricted West Bank residents' travel abroad.

In January 1991, during the Gulf War and against the backdrop of the First Intifada, Israel revoked the general permit. From then on, every Palestinian resident of the West Bank had to obtain an individual entry permit to enter areas within the Green Line, the Gaza Strip, or East Jerusalem. Over time, Israel's permit system grew into a complex, cumbersome, and opaque bureaucracy on which every Palestinian depends to move between areas under Israeli control and gain access to work, medical care, and other basic needs. Within that, the authority to approve or deny a permit often rests with an individual soldier and may be exercised arbitrarily. Israel also uses the system to collect information about Palestinians and recruit collaborators. Since 2005, for example, every Palestinian entering Israel has been required to carry a biometric card containing all of the holder's identifying information. This requirement enables the Israeli regime to steadily expand the personal database it uses to broaden and deepen its control.

In March 1993, approximately two years after the permit policy was introduced, Israel imposed a "general closure" on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which it claimed was necessary for security reasons and which has never been lifted. The closure led to the construction of checkpoints inside the West Bank, between the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and between the West Bank and the Green Line. It not only tightened the entry-permit system, with permits sometimes revoked altogether under a "complete closure," but also split Palestinian space into four separate and isolated areas: the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and areas within the Green Line. By denying Palestinians freedom of movement between them, Israel severed the territorial continuity connecting centers of Palestinian life.

Under the 1995 Oslo II Accord, the West Bank was divided into three separate areas for administrative purposes. Hebron was an exception: its division into H1 and H2 was established only in the 1997 Hebron Agreement. Intended as a temporary arrangement lasting five years, the division was based on demographic considerations that reflected neither geographic realities nor the spatial and social fabric of the Palestinian population, and did not account for its future needs. Densely populated Palestinian areas were designated Areas A and B and formally placed under full or partial administrative and policing control of the Palestinian Authority. Rather than forming a contiguous territory, these areas were split into 165 "islands" scattered across the West Bank. The remaining approximately 60%, which contain all the settlements and almost all Palestinian land reserves and agricultural land, designated Area C and remained under full Israeli control.

Since the Oslo Accords, Israel has restricted Palestinian travel on roads in Area C through a network of roadblocks and checkpoints. It has barred Palestinians from some roads altogether, impairing their freedom of movement. As additional settlements were established in Area C, the geographic fragmentation of Palestinian space and the restrictions on movement between its enclaves deepened. Closing areas under settlement jurisdiction to Palestinians and building bypass roads around settlements and between them and Israel separated Palestinian villages from one another, from their farmland, and from major Palestinian cities.

With the outbreak of the Second Intifada in September 2000, Israel imposed further, more severe restrictions on Palestinian movement within the West Bank. It erected dozens of checkpoints and hundreds of physical obstacles, including earth mounds, concrete blocks, and trenches. At the same time, Israel significantly tightened movement

restrictions imposed on "administrative" grounds, including restrictions on the use of roads, age-based restrictions, and a more stringent permit regime. These measures reinforced the restrictions already in place.

In 2002, Israel began building the Separation Barrier. Eighty-five percent of the barrier's route was located on Palestinian land in the West Bank, slicing through Palestinian communities, while also separating Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and preventing access into the Green Line Territories. Most of the barrier consists of an electronic fence flanked by "security roads", barbed-wire fences, and trenches. Most of its route runs inside the West Bank rather than along the Green Line, seizing additional Palestinian land and creating a "Seam Zone" subject to particularly severe movement restrictions, including a special entry-permit requirement. The barrier further entrenched the fragmentation of Palestinian space and separated the West Bank from Jerusalem and areas within the Green Line. It divided families and separated landowners from their land, deepened segregation, and expanded Israel's capacity to monitor and control Palestinians.

The tightening of movement restrictions since October 2023 is therefore part of a longer process of fragmenting and steadily reducing the space available for Palestinian life. Because this process has unfolded gradually, it is difficult to draw a clear line between "before" and "after." The following sections examine the intensification since 2023 against the background of the infrastructure that made it possible.

Movement Restrictions: The Current Situation

Entry into Areas Within the Green Line and "Border Crossings"

B'Tselem's monitoring and documentation show that approximately 40 checkpoints stand between the West Bank and areas within the Green Line and East Jerusalem; 28 are permanently staffed. Although they serve as the final checkpoint before entry into areas within the Green Line or East Jerusalem, most are located several kilometers inside the West Bank rather than on the Green Line. Their placement deepens the seizure of Palestinian land and shows how movement restrictions and closures operate in tandem with expulsion and dispossession.

The Separation Barrier

In 2002, Israel established the Separation Barrier. A key consideration in determining the Separation Barrier's route was the location of settlements and the desire to include them "inside Israel". Israel did not build the barrier along the Green Line or within its sovereign territory, but for the most part deep within the West Bank, laying the groundwork for de facto annexation of most settlements and their land reserves for their future expansion. The barrier effectively cut East Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank, separated approximately 150 Palestinian communities from their land, severed Palestinian urban and agricultural continuity, cut ties between communities and divided families. Thousands of Palestinians were left without access to their land or the ability to cultivate or use it.

Running deep inside the West Bank, the Separation Barrier created a fragmented landscape of Palestinian enclaves, sliced through villages and cut neighborhoods off from the urban centers on which they depend. The barrier also subjected Palestinians travelling from the West Bank into the Green Line territories to checkpoints and permits. In East Jerusalem, the chosen route departed from the municipal boundary and left several Palestinian villages and neighborhoods outside, i.e., east of the barrier although Palestinians living in these areas hold permanent residency. These residents pay taxes to the Jerusalem Municipality yet receive few corresponding services. Since the barrier was built, Israeli authorities have provided almost no basic services in these areas, whose residents suffer persistent neglect. The village of a-Nu'man, for example, has been cut off from both Jerusalem and the West Bank since the barrier was built in 2003 and Mazmuriya checkpoint was installed in 2006, leaving its residents in almost complete geographic isolation.

Moreover, the route in the Jerusalem area restricts the movement of residents left east of it, many of whom study or work in Jerusalem and rely on the city for essential services and medical care. Although they do not need permits to enter Israel, unlike their relatives in the West Bank, they still spend hours in traffic to cross the checkpoints. Residents of Kafr 'Aqab traveling to Jerusalem for medical care, for example, may wait for hours at Qalandia and Hizma checkpoints, sometimes putting their lives at risk.

Muhammad al-Ju'beh, a 39-year-old father of five from Kafr 'Aqab in northern Jerusalem, crosses Qalandia checkpoint every day to reach Jerusalem. He described the exhausting routine and arbitrary mistreatment involved:

> **"At Qalandia Checkpoint, there's always a long line of cars. It takes between 30 minutes and an hour to reach the inspection point and exit the checkpoint toward an electric gate controlled by a soldier. The soldier waits until five cars have completed the inspection before opening the checkpoint and letting them through toward Jerusalem.**
>
> **This is why I prefer to travel via Jaba' Checkpoint, even though it closes at certain hours to give smoother passage to settlers traveling from settlements in the central and northern West Bank to Jerusalem. They let us continue from the Adam roundabout circle to Hizma Checkpoint and into Jerusalem only after all the settlers have passed. [...] The soldiers close the checkpoint at least twice a day, in the morning between 5:00 A.M. and 9:00 A.M. and in the afternoon between 4:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M., and sometimes from 5:00 P.M. until 8:00 P.M."** Full testimony

Muhammad al-Ju'beh's testimony shows how the movement regime in the West Bank systematically prioritizes Jewish-Israelis over Palestinians. Jaba' checkpoint is closed during the crucial morning and afternoon hours when residents leave for work or school or return home, clearing the road for settlers and sparing them traffic congestion. For Palestinians, the closure means a longer journey, more waiting, and no ability to plan their day; for settlers, it ensures faster and more continuous travel. This hierarchy is not an incidental feature of one checkpoint's operation, but an expression of declared policy. In August 2023, Minister of National Security Itamar Ben Gvir said: "My right, the right of my wife and my children to move around Judea and Samaria is more important than freedom of movement for the Arabs. My right to life comes before freedom of movement." The testimony shows how this view is put into daily practice: the same space and roads are governed by two distinct tiers of rights, determined by the national identity of those using them.

Between the Green Line and the Separation Barrier: The "Seam Zone"

The circuitous route of the Separation Barrier, 85% of which lies inside the West Bank and is more than twice the length of the Green Line, has created Palestinian enclaves known as the "Seam Zone": agricultural land and villages trapped between the barrier and the Green Line. According to Kerem Navot, this area covers nearly 140,000 dunams [1 dunam = 0.1 hectares], almost one-tenth of the West Bank. Since October 2023, Israel has revoked Palestinian farmers' permits to access their land in the Seam Zone. In March 2025, responding to a petition by HaMoked: Center for the Defence of the Individual, Israel stated that it did not intend to renew them. The website of the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories publishes eight separate procedure files governing entry permits to the Seam Zone for agricultural, commercial, educational, medical, and other needs. Together, these procedures form part of a permit regime that requires Palestinians to seek authorization again and again simply to maintain the most basic daily routines in the area.

According to OCHA data, over 14,000 Palestinians without Israeli citizenship lived in the Seam Zone as of 2026. They have almost no ability to enter or leave this area and depend on the permit regime simply to live in their own homes. Palestinian communities outside the Seam Zone are likewise denied access to agricultural land they own within it.

However, restrictions on freedom of movement do more than devastate livelihoods; they also drive Palestinians from their land and facilitate dispossession. According to Kerem Navot, an Israeli NGO which monitors settlement construction in the West Bank, approximately 1,000 dunams belonging to the Palestinian village of Nuba, north of Hebron, were left east of the Separation Barrier, and residents have not been allowed to access them since its construction was completed. In the Palestinian villages of al-Mutilla and Jalbun, near Mount Gilboa and the Beit She'an Valley, Israeli movement restrictions likewise facilitate land seizure. Large portions of the villages' land lie in the Seam Zone, beyond the barrier, and are now used to graze Israeli cattle. Denied access, the Palestinian owners have been forced to sell most of their flocks.

Together, the permit system, which makes Palestinian movement into and out of the West Bank nearly impossible, and the route of the Separation Barrier, create intolerable living conditions for residents of the Seam Zone. They may cross the barrier into the West Bank, but need an entry permit to return home, even though their homes lie in the West Bank.

They cannot enter Israel without risking arrest for "illegal presence." Israelis and tourists, by contrast, need no permit at all to enter the Seam Zone.

An especially stark example is the Palestinian village of Barta'ah, which is split by the Separation Barrier. The residents of Barta'ah who live west of the Separation Barrier hold Israeli identity cards and therefore have access to healthcare services in Israel and freedom of movement within its territory. Yet, residents of Barta'ah a-Sharqiyah, living east of the Green Line and holding Palestinian citizenships, are locked inside an enclave that cuts it off from other communities in the West Bank, including Jenin District and the towns of Ya'bad to the east and Qaffin to the south. In October 2023, the military applied the permit regime to this area. Residents of western Barta'ah hold Israeli citizenship, and therefore enjoy access to healthcare and freedom of movement within Israel. Yet those who live in eastern Barta'ah who are West Bank residents, are confined to the enclave and denied basic human rights. Ambulances traveling from eastern Barta'ah to a hospital in Jenin must obtain authorization from the Israeli District Coordination Office and frequently wait for hours at the checkpoint, even in life-threatening situations.

In September 2025, GOC Central Command Avi Bluth declared 20,000 dunams north of Jerusalem part of the Seam Zone. The area includes the Palestinian villages of Beit Iksa, a-Nabi Samwil, and al-Khalayleh, which were already on the "Israeli" side of the Separation Barrier. Until then, however, their residents had "benefited" from a relatively permissive arrangement based on village resident lists and could cross the barrier. Relatives, friends, and service providers still had to obtain a permit and special coordination for every entry into the enclave villages. The declaration sharply tightened restrictions on local residents. They must now submit individual permit applications, provide numerous documents, and meet a series of draconian conditions simply to reach their own homes.

Allenby Crossing

Israel controls all crossings into and out of the West Bank and prevents Palestinians from traveling abroad through its international airports and seaports. For millions of West Bank residents, the only route open to travel abroad is therefore Allenby Crossing, about five kilometers from Jericho, which links the West Bank to Jordan. Its

hours change frequently, adding to the arbitrariness and uncertainty over whether passage will be possible.

Thousands of Palestinians pass through Allenby Crossing each day, as do large quantities of goods bound for the West Bank or Gaza and goods intended for export. Every year, Israel bars thousands of Palestinians from traveling abroad, sometimes for years and often without explanation or advance notice. Many understand how the system operates and forgo travel altogether. In 2021, 10,000 Palestinians were prohibited from traveling abroad. Of the appeals filed, 50% were subsequently approved. This figure points, among other things, to the arbitrariness of exit-ban decisions, which are sometimes generated through a cold, automatic bureaucratic process. In other cases, Palestinians barred from traveling without notice, explanation, or a hearing have been required to sign a "commitment to refrain from terrorism" form in order to receive permission to leave the West Bank. People Israel classifies as subject to a "security restriction" are not eligible for exit permits at all.

In September 2025, after a Jordanian citizen shot and killed two soldiers at Allenby Crossing, Israeli authorities immediately closed the crossing to all passenger and freight traffic into and out of the West Bank, until further notice. The complete closure left Palestinian travelers with no way to leave the West Bank. Approximately one week later, the crossing reopened to passengers but remained closed to goods until December 2025, when it reopened following a petition by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel. Curtailing and disrupting operations at Allenby Crossing harms the West Bank economy and residents' welfare and, in some cases, endangers seriously ill patients who need lifesaving treatment outside the West Bank (for further discussion, see the chapter "Economic Strangulation").

The Apartheid Road System

For decades, Israel has restricted or prohibited Palestinian vehicles from using various roads in the West Bank. Palestinians generally have no access to the main traffic arteries through Area C, which also limits their access to roads within the Area A and B enclaves. Continuous travel on these roads is reserved for Israeli citizens exclusively. Palestinians access is restricted mostly through obstacles placed on access roads that prevent continuous use. According to OCHA, as of 2026, at least half of all movement obstacles in the West Bank, 459 in total, blocked or delayed travel between Palestinian cities and

villages and major roads. These obstacles divert Palestinian traffic onto a longer, less convenient secondary network, often made up of narrow, rough dirt roads that make travel even more difficult.

For instance, approximately 26% of the movement obstacles documented by OCHA, 121 in total, block or restrict access between Palestinian cities and villages and Route 60, the main north-south artery through the West Bank. Additional OCHA data for 2024 show 61 checkpoints for Palestinians along the 57 kilometers of Route 505, which crosses the West Bank from east to west and connects the Jordan Valley to the northern West Bank.

Some roads are closed to Palestinians but remain open to settlers living nearby. Route 367, for example, connects the settlements of Alon Shvut and Bat Ayin to the Green Line and has become a road reserved for Israelis. Palestinians are likewise effectively prevented from traveling through various parts of Route 443, even though it was built partly on land expropriated from them. This road once carried most traffic between Ramallah and surrounding villages. In 1988, Israel expropriated land from nearby villages to widen it; since 2002, Palestinians have been barred from using it, leaving the road for Israelis exclusively. A ruling handed down in 2009 in a subsequent petition to the High Court of Justice held that Palestinians must be allowed to use the section running through the West Bank. Yet the military's implementation of the ruling continues to impose and entrench severe restrictions on Palestinian movement. The same pattern appears on Route 60, whose 2021 expansion involved the expropriation of 11 dunams from the Palestinian village of al-Khader and the city of Beit Jala. The policy has continued since then with numerous directives and orders expropriating hundreds of additional dunams of Palestinian land to expand the road.

In March 2025, the Israeli government approved an apartheid road between Ma'ale Adumim and Jerusalem. The Civil Administration calls it the "Fabric of Life Road"; Naftali Bennett, who was defense minister when the road was planned, called it the "Sovereignty Road." The plan advances separate road systems for Israelis and Palestinians, creating a "ring" around Ma'ale Adumim. Its construction is expected to close 3% of the West Bank to Palestinians. Presented as a means of providing "transportation continuity," the road system will sever Palestinian territorial continuity between the northern and southern West Bank. Traffic between the two areas near Ma'ale Adumim would be diverted onto a road built exclusively for Palestinians. These roads are a central component of the E1

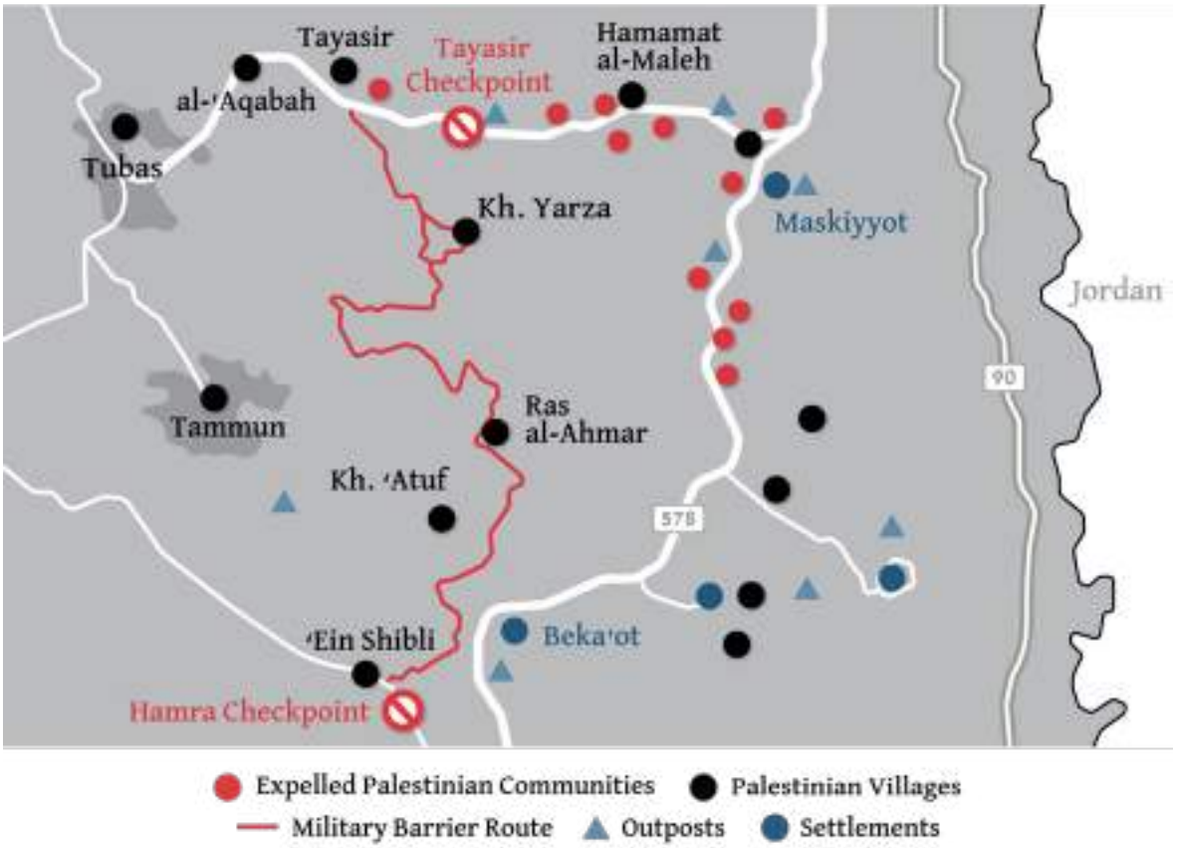
construction plan, which covers approximately 12 square kilometers between Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim. At the plan's signing ceremony, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "No Palestinian state will be established," and stated that construction in E1 was expected to sever Palestinian territorial continuity between the southern and northern West Bank.

Construction of the road will harm communities along its planned route. It will cut Wadi al-Jamil and Jabal al-Baba, home to hundreds of Palestinians, off from their surroundings, and it is unclear how residents will cross the road to reach their homes. The route is also planned to run through homes in Wadi al-Jamil, in Area B, which would be demolished to make way for it. In practice, this could result in the expulsion of the 18 Palestinian communities living in the area, according to OCHA.

A New Military Barrier in the Northern Jordan Valley

In late August 2025, Central Command commander Avi Bluth signed nine land seizure orders for a new 22-kilometer military separation barrier in the northern Jordan Valley. The military calls the project "Scarlet Thread." Under the plan, Israel is expected to demolish numerous homes, livestock pens, infrastructure, and agricultural areas that the military describes as an "operational vulnerability." The route begins at the entrance to 'Ein Shibli, where the military relocated the Hamra checkpoint in early February 2026. It is planned to cross the land of Khirbet 'Atuf and Khirbet a-Ras al-Ahmar, continue through Khirbet Yarza, and connect with the Tayasir checkpoint to the north. It passes through privately owned Palestinian agricultural land containing orchards, crops, greenhouses, and water wells cultivated over many years.

'SCARLET THREAD' BARRIER



***Approximately 900 residents will be cut off from healthcare, education, and their sources of livelihood.**
***777 dunams of privately owned land will be expropriated.**
***Access to an area of about 50,000 dunams will be blocked.**

Source: Kerem Navot

After the plan was published, landowners and residents were given only one week to object. They petitioned the High Court of Justice to freeze the work, and the Court ordered construction suspended. It qualified the order, however, by allowing work to proceed wherever the military claimed an "urgent security need." In early March 2026, the military invoked such a need to excavate the section east of Khirbet 'Atuf and began work there. In July 2026, the High Court held that the barrier could be built along the planned route. It nevertheless temporarily froze the demolition of several homes and ordered

the military to find alternatives for two sections: one near Khirbet a-Ras al-Ahmar and another surrounding Khirbet Yarza.

As construction proceeds, settler attacks on Palestinian communities along the planned route have intensified since the summer of 2025. At least five entire communities and several families living east of Khirbet 'Atuf and around Khirbet a-Ras al-Ahmar have been driven from their homes under the pressure of settler violence. Israel has also destroyed extensive farmland and infrastructure along the route, including water lines and greenhouses, severely impairing Palestinians' ability to remain in the area. Full implementation of the plan would cut residents off from thousands of dunams of farmland they own and expel hundreds of people from Palestinian communities in the area. It would also facilitate settler takeover of the land, further harming the residents and farmers who remain.

In June 2026, B'Tselem field researcher 'Aref Daraghmeh, who lives in the area, described the barrier excavation near Khirbet 'Atuf and Khirbet a-Ras al-Ahmar:

> **"For the third consecutive month, military bulldozers have been excavating, leveling ground, and digging trenches in the area, under the military's decision to build a fence and military road. According to notices given to residents, the fence will extend across thousands of dunams, most of them cultivated land with greenhouses and crops. On the morning of 18 June 2026, military bulldozers destroyed large fields of onions and medicinal plants. They also uprooted approximately 20 mature olive trees belonging to one family and destroyed metal water pipes and irrigation lines. Farmers have begun dismantling functioning greenhouses themselves for fear that the military will destroy them, causing heavy losses."**

Israel presents the new barrier as a response to a security need. In practice, however, it is intended to deepen the spatial fragmentation of the West Bank, tighten control over Palestinian movement, and facilitate greater Israeli control of the area. Several Palestinian communities have already been expelled from the area in recent years. In this respect, cutting the few that remain off from the rest of the West Bank is highly likely to result in their forcible displacement.

Arbitrariness, Flying Checkpoints, and Village Closures

In February 2025, several Israeli human rights organizations petitioned the High Court of Justice, demanding that the military and Civil Administration routinely publish orders imposing movement restrictions on Palestinians in the West Bank. Publication would allow residents to know how long the restrictions remain in force, where they apply, whom they affect, and under what authority or justification they were imposed. The state responded that it did not dispute its duty to publish the orders but had no intention of doing so. Instead, it proposed alternatives such as posting them at police stations inside settlements, places Palestinians are prohibited from entering, in part because of the very restrictions set out in the orders. Resulting from the filling of the petition, the Israeli regime's legal adviser for the West Bank warned that movement restrictions were being imposed arbitrarily and contrary to military orders. The Israeli authorities' refusal to publish them reflects the logic of these oppressive restrictions: violating the rights of the Palestinian population is not a "bug" in the system, but its purpose.

Military flying checkpoints are another method used to disrupt and halt Palestinian movement in the West Bank. At these temporary roadblocks, soldiers stop traffic between villages or at village entrances, inspect travelers' identity cards, and sometimes photograph them.

In other cases, checkpoints are placed at the entrances to Palestinian villages rather than on main roads or at intersections, potentially trapping residents inside and preventing them from leaving by car. For instance, a stone barrier at the entrance to Khirbet Sarra, south of Nablus between the settlements of Shilo and Shvut Rachel, prevents residents from driving out. Even leaving on foot requires permission from the neighboring settlement. "They told us that if we leave on foot without informing them, they'll give us trouble," said Mahmoud, a resident of Khirbet Sarra, which is blocked from every direction. Life in the village shows how Palestinian movement is restricted through a combination of permanent physical obstacles, elaborate bureaucratic mechanisms, fear, and settler threats. Together, these mechanisms constrain residents even where no physical barrier exists, fostering despair and leading people to forgo travel plans altogether.

The same pattern is evident in Um Safa, north of Ramallah. Immediately after 7 October 2023, the village was closed to traffic from every direction. Three barriers were installed on one side of the village, which has 700 residents. Anyone dropped off at the entrance

cannot board another vehicle beyond the barriers and must instead walk hundreds of meters. These closures join severe, systematic settler violence against residents, carried out with soldiers' assistance for years.

Beyond manned checkpoints, including military flying checkpoints, the West Bank is covered by permanent unstaffed obstacles: concrete blocks, iron gates, earth embankments, large rocks, iron bars, and trenches dug alongside roads. Most remain fixed in place, blocking paved or dirt roads indefinitely, or until the military suddenly decides to remove them. Yellow and orange iron gates at the entrances to hundreds of West Bank cities and villages are opened and closed intermittently, arbitrarily, and without warning.

According to OCHA, in the first two weeks of September 2025, Israel installed 18 new iron gates and nine other obstacles across the West Bank. This infrastructure allows major traffic arteries to be closed quickly, on command, and with minimal personnel, disrupting Palestinian daily life. Due to these policies, every trip is uncertain for a Palestinian living in the West Bank. A gate open on the outward journey may be closed on the return; it may open or close without warning; and it may or may not be supervised by soldiers. The resulting uncertainty makes travel across the West Bank arbitrary and unpredictable, denying Palestinians the ability to plan their journeys or predict their duration.

Yusef Kashur, 34, a father of six from the town of Dura south of Hebron, described how the closures had turned his work as a driver into a daily nightmare:

> "Since the events of 7 October and the beginning of the war in Gaza, the Israeli military has installed dozens of gates on roads, controlled by soldiers who open and close them on a whim. Among the gates and checkpoints that make my daily work difficult are: the a-Dhahiriyah gate, which has been closed since 7 October, the gate the military placed at the entrance to the town of Dura, which was also closed since 7 October but opened about a month ago, the a-Nashash checkpoint in the city of Bethlehem, which closes every day at 7:00 P.M., and the Beit Sahur gate ('Ush al-Ghurab), which also closes every day at 7:00 P.M. Since these gates were put up, my work has become a torment, because I keep having to bypass gates and drive around between them, sometimes on difficult and dangerous dirt roads, which is especially frightening at night. These

> drives are exhausting, take a very long time, and the fuel costs so much that I don't make enough to cover our household needs. So I've stopped accepting fares outside the area and make do with local rides. They aren't easy either, because I have to bypass closures and go through the various entrances to communities to reach the drop-off points. Sometimes I still have to accept fares outside the area because I feel bad turning down regular customers and friends." Full testimony

Violence at Checkpoints

Beyond restricting movement and disrupting daily life, routine encounters between Palestinians and soldiers at checkpoints often involve harassment, invasive inspections, abuse during body searches, delays, and denial of passage, sometimes arbitrarily. Over the years, B'Tselem has documented numerous human rights violations, including to the point of injury or death, at or near checkpoints. However, the longstanding violence at checkpoints has drastically intensified since October 2023: searches are more stringent, closures more frequent, and violent acts more widespread.

Amir al-Fakhuri, a 23-year-old resident of Tel Rumeidah in central Hebron, described an attack by soldiers at Bab a-Zawiya checkpoint:

> "We went into the passageway that leads to the electronic inspection room. We asked the soldier why he was swearing at us, and he answered in Hebrew: "Because." He kept on swearing at us, and 'Abdallah asked him why he was doing it. Then we saw two soldiers come out of the room behind the glass. We were sure they were coming to beat us up. The inspection room was closed and we couldn't get out. The two soldiers came into the inspection room, threw two stun grenades between our legs and started pushing us out of the room, back to the turnstile we came in through, to push us out of the checkpoint and stop us from getting home. We refused to go out and insisted they let us through so we could get home.

The two soldiers hit us all over our bodies with the barrels of their guns, and then cocked the guns and pointed them at us for a few minutes.

> Then they left us lying on the ground inside the checkpoint compound. The turnstile was closed. They started walking back into the checkpoint, and 'Abdallah started filming them so we'd have a record and could file a complaint. When they saw him filming, they came back and one of them tried to take his phone away, but 'Abdallah threw it out of the checkpoint through the barbed wire fence. They started beating us again. One of them hit 'Abdallah hard on the head, and he started bleeding. The other soldier hit me with the barrel of his gun on my arm and leg. Then they opened the turnstile so we'd go back out to where we came in. They went back inside the checkpoint and didn't let us get home." Full testimony

Killing is the most extreme manifestation of violence at checkpoints. On 26 January 2025, undercover Border Police officers at Qalandia checkpoint shot Adam Sub Laban, a 16-year-old from Kafr 'Aqab in East Jerusalem, and wounded him and two other people. The police claimed that the youths had thrown an explosive device at the officers. The three wounded Palestinians were evacuated to a hospital in Ramallah, where Sub Laban died of his wounds. His mother told B'Tselem:

> "Adam, who was killed when he was 16, was the eldest of my three children. He studied in the literature track, but he especially loved everything related to cars and planned to learn to drive and get a license so he could buy one. Like all young people, he dreamed of starting a family and building a home. Above all, he was defined by kindness and compassion. Because we live separately from his father, he felt a great deal of responsibility towards his younger brother and sister and me. His greatest aspiration was to find work and earn money so that he could buy us a house in the future, instead of our current rented place. Adam's loss is a hard blow. He's gone, and there's nothing that can or will replace him. His death left me with a wound that is hard to heal. I see his face reflected in the faces of his brother and sister, and sometimes I feel that I can't bear the pain of his absence and his memory. After I raised him for 16 years, I lost him because of a treacherous bullet fired by an Israeli soldier. Only

> **the thought that I'm not alone in this pain, that my situation is similar to that of thousands of Palestinian mothers who lost their sons only because they were Palestinian and chose to live, eases the pain." Full testimony**

Settler Roadblocks: Institutionalized Blurring of Boundaries

Settlers involvement ranges from sporadic violent roadblocks to institutionalized participation in military Regional Defense Battalions. This arrangement gives settlers not only firearms, but also legitimacy to act on behalf of the state and even legal impunity.

Route 367 illustrates the movement restrictions settlers impose in the West Bank. It connects Gush Etzion Junction to the settlement of Bat Ayin and continues to the checkpoint leading from the West Bank into areas within the Green Line. The military has closed the road to Palestinian traffic except for residents of Jaba' and Khallet Sakariya, the two villages for which it is the only access road. In late 2025, residents of nearby settlements serving in Regional Defense Battalions were seen staffing these checkpoints.

In the High Court petition discussed above, several human rights organizations demanded that the military explain why it does not routinely publish orders imposing movement restrictions on Palestinians in the West Bank. The state proposed that soldiers spray-paint the Hebrew letter tzadi on military roadblocks to indicate that they had been installed by an official body rather than civilians. The proposal is inherently unreliable: anyone could spray the letter on a roadblock and mislead residents. This is especially problematic as the growing blurring of boundaries and deepening cooperation between official forces and civilians make it increasingly impossible to distinguish between them. Nor did the proposal adequately answer the organizations' demand for an explanation of why the roadblocks were imposed. As of July 2026, the petition remained pending, and there was no indication that the state had implemented its proposal to spray the letter tzadi on roadblocks.

Elsewhere, settler protests thwarted a plan to allow Palestinian traffic on a bypass road near the Wadi Nar route. This left the winding, narrow and congested route, which skirts Jerusalem, as the only way for Palestinians to travel between the northern and southern West Bank, since they are not permitted to travel through the city itself. Such protests occur throughout the West Bank. According to media reports, lobbying by the settler group "Fighting for Life", which promotes settler protests that block roads, has in several cases

led to the closure of access roads to Palestinian communities. The group often intervenes even in cases where the military seeks to allow Palestinians to travel. Its members routinely photograph roads open to Palestinians and send the images to a council head, settlement security coordinator, hotline, the military, or a settlement security squad, seeking to have the roads closed. Official state bodies often comply.

Settlers also set up flying roadblocks, some while armed and serving in the military. Since October 2023, B'Tselem has documented settlers placing roadblocks on West Bank roads, delaying and inspecting Palestinian vehicles. One such case was the February 2024 attack on two residents of 'Asirah al-Qibliyah, described in testimony collected by a B'Tselem field researcher. In another, settlers blocked the main road between Deir Jarir and Silwad for approximately four hours, threw stones at vehicles with Palestinian license plates, and damaged at least one vehicle, according to OCHA. Attacks in Deir Jarir, a Palestinian village near Ramallah, show another way settlers violently deny Palestinians freedom of movement. Between May and September 2025, eight outposts were established around the village. Settlers emerge from them to attack residents and arbitrarily block roads. In some cases, the attacks have resulted in killings. At times, an attack on a road restricts movement even without a physical roadblock.

These cases illustrate the two central components of the mechanisms controlling movement in the West Bank: physical obstruction and the threat of being exposed to direct assault. Each combines the obstacle itself, whether an iron gate, earth mound, or armed settler or military force, with the threat of violence inherent in the encounter. Without that threat, the physical barrier is less effective.

Rawan Rashaydah, a 33-year-old mother of two from 'Arab a-Rashaydah in the Bethlehem area, described how she and her family were attacked on their way home from the hospital, where she had given birth to her son:

> "On Tuesday, 30 December 2025, at around 2:00 P.M., Anas, 28, my husband's son from a previous marriage, arrived in his friend Muhammad's car to pick Yusef and me up from my parents' home in Jenin, where we stayed for a few days after I gave birth to Mazen. On the way home, near the settlement of Ma'ale Amos, we noticed settlers chasing us in two ATVs, and then one of the ATVs suddenly crashed hard into the back of the car.

> Muhammad stopped the car, and he and Anas got out to see what happened.
>
> Four settlers got off the ATVs, one of them armed with a rifle that he pointed at Anas and Muhammad, and they and the settlers started exchanging words that escalated into shoving, until the settler pointed his gun at Anas and Muhammad again and threatened to shoot them. Two of the settlers hit them, scratching and cutting Anas's face, and the fourth settler went over to the car and started throwing stones at it. One of the stones shattered the rear window and hit the back of my head, and when I put my hand on the spot where I was hit, it was covered in blood.
>
> I ignored my injury because I was busy protecting my children from the glass shards that fell on them and from the stones the settler kept hurling at us, even though he saw there were children in the car. My son Yusef screamed and cried in fear, and I held him and tried to calm him down. The attack went on for many minutes until the armed settler ordered Anas and Muhammad to get in the car and leave the area.
>
> We started driving, thinking we were getting away from the settlers, but they kept chasing us on the ATVs until we reached the entrance to the village, where we saw an Israeli military jeep. Muhammad stopped the car, went over to the jeep, and told the soldiers that settlers were chasing us. The soldiers saw the settlers, saw the blood on my hands and on my head covering, and saw the shattered rear window. But they simply let the settlers leave without arresting them.
>
> Muhammad called the Israeli police, reported the attack and said there were injured people. After about 20 minutes, an Israeli ambulance arrived, but the police didn't. [...]
>
> This attack had a severe psychological impact on my children and on me. My breast milk dried up because of the fear and shock, and I'm having trouble nursing Mazen. Yusef is fearful and has trouble sleeping in his bed at night. He clings to me all the time and comes to sleep with his father and me." Full testimony

The Effects of Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

Almost every aspect of life, including work, education, medical care, family visits, commerce, and farming, depends on the ability to move through space. The closures and restrictions described above do more than make travel difficult; they directly undermine Palestinians' ability to maintain a daily routine. When a road can be blocked without warning, a checkpoint can close at any moment, and there is no assurance of returning home, leaving the house becomes a decision fraught with risk and uncertainty. Many people therefore remain home even when the road is open, fearing they may be unable to return or may spend hours waiting. The denial of freedom of movement thus creates paralysis far beyond the immediate refusal of passage. It disrupts access to work, education, timely medical care, family and community ties, commerce, and agricultural land. Persistent uncertainty deprives residents of the ability to plan their days and their lives and erodes the basic conditions necessary for personal, family, social, and economic life.

Harm to Employment

The effects of movement restrictions on employment cannot be captured by monetary figures or calculations of direct economic loss. They create a pervasive sense of paralyzing helplessness that affects people's ability to meet their most basic needs. Roadblocks make workers repeatedly late; force them onto long, damaged routes; shape decisions about where to live; consume working hours in checkpoint lines; and, for thousands of families, cut off access to agricultural land that provides their livelihood. Together with rising fuel prices, these restrictions make travel increasingly costly and difficult, creating a cycle that steadily undermines people's ability to sustain themselves economically.

W.R., a woman in her twenties and the mother of an infant who works as a bank clerk in Ramallah, described the impact in her testimony:

> "After I got several verbal and written warnings at work for being late, we had to start leaving home at 6:20 A.M., which meant convincing the daycare staff to take our son before opening time, and that involved an extra fee. Add to that the stress caused by waiting in lines at checkpoints on the way to work and back. About six months ago, when we realized

> there was no solution and no route that would get us out of this trouble, we started looking for an alternative. My husband and I agreed the best solution was to look for an apartment in Ramallah. My husband spent six months looking for a place, but rental prices have sky-rocketed, which made it very hard to find something reasonable. Still, about 20 days ago, we found an apartment more or less suited to our financial means, and two weeks ago we moved in. Although the rent is a significant financial burden for us, we feel some relief, because our suffering for almost two years due to the extreme restrictions on movement is over." Full testimony

Muhammad al-Ju'beh, a 39-year-old father of five from Kafr 'Aqab in northern Jerusalem, lost his job after movement restrictions repeatedly made him late. His testimony illustrates another way the closure system and movement restrictions shape Palestinian life and undermine the ability to earn a living:

> "I've lost my job because of the checkpoint. I was supposed to show up for work at 7:00 A.M., but because of the checkpoints, especially Jaba', I couldn't make it on time. During the morning rush hour, cars stand at Qalandia Checkpoint for between 40 minutes and an hour and a half, and so some cars turn to Jaba' Checkpoint, which is also closed, and people wait in their cars for a long time until it opens.
>
> And so, in order to make it to work on Jaffa Street by 7:00 A.M., I had to wait in the line of cars at Qalandia Checkpoint at 4:00 A.M., or at Jaba' Checkpoint at 5:00 A.M. But even if I reached Jaba' Checkpoint at that hour, sometimes there were surprises, and it didn't open on time, and then I'd be late for work. I was fired from my job on Jaffa Street because I kept arriving late." Full testimony

Denial of Access to Health Care

A 2025 report by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) found that the movement-restrictions regime makes access to basic health care extraordinarily difficult and sometimes

impossible. Patients must anticipate delays, roadblocks, and denial of passage on the way to treatment. The consequences can be life-threatening, especially for isolated Palestinian communities. 'Adlah Abu Ermeileh, an 86-year-old mother of five and grandmother from Dahiyat al-Bareed in East Jerusalem, said:

> **"I don't know what to do. I'm totally lost. My husband and I have limited mobility. I can't walk long distances, and my husband, who is blind, also has a lot of trouble walking. How will we get medical care now? Until now, our sons or our daughters-in-law drove us wherever we needed to go, HMO clinics, hospitals and so on. Now, after they sealed off the neighborhood with these blocks, it's become impossible. At most, they can drive us up to the concrete blocks, and from there we have to get to the other side somehow. If something happens to us while everyone is at work, for example, how can an ambulance get to our house to take us to the hospital, when the neighborhood is closed off like this?"** Full testimony

Because of movement restrictions, ambulances must navigate a maze of constantly changing obstacles, transfer patients between vehicles at checkpoints, or take circuitous, unpaved, and dangerous roads to avoid checkpoints and reach hospitals in time. In an interview with Haaretz, ambulance driver Bashar Qaryuti described how he and his medical team had been forced to move patients beneath the iron gates at the entrence to West Bank communities. He added:

> **"Although we try to coordinate and inform them that we need to enter for humanitarian reasons, coordination has not been granted in a single case. The day before yesterday, I was transporting patients and went to Sarra checkpoint near Nablus, and soldiers began shooting at us. I had patients with me. They did not let us through, and we had to enter the city by a distant, dangerous dirt road through the mountains. It is very difficult for the patients."**

In September 2024, special forces entered Tulkarm Refugee Camp and shot and killed two young passersby, Ahmad Majdubah, 25, and Hibat Allah 'Obeid, 21. In both cases, Israeli forces obstructed ambulances and medical personnel who might have helped save their

lives; in one instance, they fired live ammunition at them. The forces also blocked access to the nearby hospital, only tens of meters from where Ahmad Majdubah was shot. This was one of many cases in which rescue teams were prevented from reaching the scene and quickly evacuating the wounded.

Even under conditions described as "routine," the proliferation of closures and checkpoints often makes lifesaving medical care difficult to obtain by forcing patients to take longer, more complicated routes. Amal Da'na, a 24-year-old mother of one from Hebron who has cancer, described to B'Tselem the impossible routine of traveling to Jordan for chemotherapy under Israeli movement restrictions:

> **"The last time I returned to Hebron after chemotherapy in Jordan was two months ago, on 10 December 2025. I suffered a lot from the crowding and the long wait on the bus that takes us to the Israeli side of Allenby bridge. I waited on the bus for about three hours. This happened on previous trips, too. Sometimes, after waiting for hours in stifling conditions, the Israeli side sends the buses back, claiming the workers' shift ends at 2:00 P.M. and the crossing is closed. [...] These procedures are exhausting, humiliating and suffocating: the long hours of waiting, the strict inspection procedures, and the fact that I have to carry my luggage all the way to the inspection terminal on the Israeli side. It's very exhausting for me, especially after chemotherapy, which is painful and exhausting in itself."** Full testimony

In another testimony, Muhammad al-Ju'beh, whose other accounts appear above, described how movement restrictions caused a medical complication for his son, who urgently needed to reach a hospital:

> **"About two years ago, when my son was four, he had severe stomach aches. The doctor advised me to take him to the hospital, and because we are Jerusalemites, I preferred to take him to a hospital inside Jerusalem. We called for an ambulance at a cost of 300 shekels (~ 100 USD). Qalandia Checkpoint was closed at that time because it's been closing intermittently since the war broke out on 7 October 2023, so we had to travel via Jaba'**

> Checkpoint, where we were delayed for about 40 minutes due to heavy traffic, and then to Hizma Checkpoint. When we got there, we transferred to an Israeli ambulance that was waiting on the other side of the checkpoint [Israeli ambulances do not enter Kafr 'Aqab without a military escort] and continued to the hospital. On the way, my son's condition deteriorated and became critical. When we reached the hospital, the doctors told us that his appendix had burst on the way to the hospital. That caused medical complications, and he was hospitalized for 30 days. If he had reached the hospital in time, after a standard appendectomy, he would have been hospitalized for only two or three days." Full testimony

Denial of Access to Education

Movement restrictions in the West Bank severely impair the ability of children, adolescents, and university students to attend classes and exercise their basic right to education. Palestinian students have faced serious restrictions on this right before October 2023. However, since then, the violent assault on every aspect of Palestinian life, including the systematic tightening of movement restrictions, has produced an unprecedented crisis in access to education in the West Bank.

According to the Education Cluster in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, between 8% and 20% of West Bank schools temporarily closed during the year after October 2023 because of movement restrictions and violence. From January through June 2024, students attended school only two days a week and were required to study remotely on the remaining days. In practice, Palestinian students have very limited access to remote learning because basic infrastructure, including internet access and the necessary equipment, is often unavailable. The daily reality of Israeli intimidation and violence also prevents a stable and safe learning environment.

Beyond the severe disruption of learning itself, denial of access to education causes multidimensional harm to children's physical and psychological well-being. According to the Education Cluster, it limits access to protection and mental-health services and increases vulnerability to violence, child labor, and child marriage.

Movement restrictions make it difficult for students and teachers alike to reach school safely. Violence and intimidation by settlers from nearby settlements further obstruct access to educational institutions. In April 2026, for example, children from the Palestinian village of Um al-Kheir in the South Hebron Hills set out for school for the first time since the Israeli-American attack on Iran began in February 2026. Settlers had blocked their route with a barbed-wire fence. When the children approached, Israeli forces accompanied by settlers from the area fired tear gas canisters at them. The fence forced the children off the only "safe" route from the village to the school and onto a longer path alongside the settlement fence, making the journey dangerous. A resident of Um al-Kheir who asked to remain anonymous placed the denial of access to education in a broader context:

> "Since 7 October 2023, the settlers have greatly increased their violence and bullying against village residents, and they have started seriously threatening our lives here. In these attacks, more than 1,000 fruit-bearing olive trees have been cut down, homes have been attacked, property damaged, sheep and goat flocks harmed, and men, women and children assaulted with clubs and pepper spray. The settlers also cut the village's main water line and took over 20 dunam (1 dunam = 0.1 hectares) of land belonging to our extended family, claiming it was state land. The Israeli military helps the settlers in their attacks, arrests young men from the village and abuses them, when they try to defend themselves or their property or following settlers' incitement.
>
> [...] Yesterday, 12 April 2026, at around 1:30 A.M., three settlers came to the road that leads to the al-Sara'iyah elementary school in the village, which has about 55 students, and blocked it with barbed wire. This morning, the first day of school after 35 days off due to the war with Iran, the students, all children between the ages of six and ten, came to the road that the settlers blocked, and I went there with several other residents and activists to help them get around the obstruction and reach school.
>
> When we arrived, we saw four soldiers standing on the other side of the barbed wire the settlers had put, and as soon as we approached the place where the children were standing, the soldiers began throwing gas canisters and stun grenades at us and at the children. The children

> inhaled the gas and were very frightened. Red Crescent teams arrived and treated them there, and then they went home. After that incident, we decided to suspend classes at the school until further notice, and we contacted the Palestinian DCO and the Palestinian Ministry of Education.
>
> At around 9:00 A.M., an Israeli DCO vehicle and a team from the Palestinian Ministry of Education came. The Israeli DCO officer suggested the children walk an alternative route that's three kilometers long and runs right next to the settlement fence, which puts the children's lives in danger. We rejected the proposal and decided to close the school until the road is reopened for the students. Yesterday, the settlers put up dozens of Israeli flags throughout the village and near the school. The purpose of blocking the road is to expand the outpost, eliminate Palestinian presence in Khirbet Um al-Kheir and force the residents to leave the area." Full testimony

The movement-restrictions regime also gravely violates the right to education by preventing teachers and other education workers from reaching their workplaces. One of many examples occurred in January 2026, when Israel refused to renew the entry permits of 171 teachers and staff members who live in the West Bank and work at schools in East Jerusalem. The decision deprived the teachers of their livelihoods and the students of their right to education.

The Destruction of Personal Life: Family, Social Life, and Political Organizing

Restrictions on movement within, into, and out of the West Bank isolate Palestinians at every level of social life. They separate entire regions, including the West Bank, and within that East Jerusalem, Gaza, and areas within the Green Line; isolate villages and neighborhoods within them; divide families within those communities; and cut off Palestinian women and men who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time from their families and communities for extended periods.

Six weeks before the October 2023 attack, Hanan, a resident of the Gaza Strip, was transferred to al-Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem because she was carrying triplets in a high-risk pregnancy. She delivered by cesarean section. When her permit to remain in East Jerusalem expired, she was forced to return to Gaza only five days later, leaving her three newborn daughters in the neonatal intensive care unit. When the war began, Israel imposed a sweeping ban on movement between the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Hanan's daughters remained in the Jerusalem hospital for a year and a half, effectively living there as orphans. Their mother did not see them until they were a year and a half old. Hanan's testimony illustrates how movement restrictions utterly disregard place of residence, family circumstances, and humanitarian need, remaining deliberately blind even to intolerable situations that tear families apart.

Movement restrictions also impede family gatherings, holiday celebrations, the preservation of family and cultural ties, and even the maintenance of ordinary routine within the West Bank itself. Muhammad al-Ju'beh, whose other testimonies appear above, described how the restrictions prevented him and his children from sharing an iftar meal with relatives:

> "I remember that during the most recent Ramadan, in 2026, we were invited to the home of my brother-in-law, my wife's brother, in Jabal al-Mukabber. Qalandia checkpoint was congested, so I drove toward Jaba' checkpoint. It was closed, and there was a long line of cars. I therefore turned back toward Ramallah and drove as far as 'Ein Siniya checkpoint. It took us two and a half hours to reach Jabal al-Mukabber, even though it is only 12 kilometers from our home. The adhan, the call to prayer marking the breaking of the fast, sounded while we were still on the road, and we had to break the fast with water. We arrived 40 minutes after iftar. Imagine children aged six, nine, 10, 16, and 17 fasting and having nothing but water to break the fast. I remember my six-year-old son beginning to cry from hunger." Full testimony

C. ECONOMIC STRANGULATION

Introduction

Israel's control of the West Bank and the mechanism of elimination it employs have a significant economic dimension. Familiarity with its components and characteristics, and with the historical process through which it took shape, is essential to understanding how it operates, both with respect to residents as individuals and with respect to the Palestinian collective. Since occupying the West Bank in 1967, Israel has developed a system of economic, bureaucratic, and spatial control mechanisms that have restricted Palestinian society's ability to develop an independent economy and have deepened its dependence on the Israeli economy. Over the years, control of land and natural resources, restrictions on movement, control of border crossings and the permit regime, the financial system, and the control of the Palestinian Authority's tax revenues have produced a structure of profound economic dependence.

While encouraging Palestinians to work inside the Green Line, Israel also pursued a policy of barring or limiting independent Palestinian production and imposed restrictions on export and import through its control of the commercial crossings serving the Palestinian economy, particularly Allenby Crossing – the only direct border crossing between the West Bank and the rest of the world (for more on Israel's control of Allenby Crossing, see the chapter A System of Movement Restrictions). These measures stymied the development of industry and trade and the realization of business and economic potential in the West Bank, while deepening internal socioeconomic disparities.

Since October 2023, Israel has significantly intensified its use of these mechanisms, as this chapter details. Measures employed for years are being applied with unprecedented force, amounting to a systematic policy of economic strangulation. This takes the form of denying livelihood opportunities, destroying civilian and agricultural infrastructure, tightening control over resources and the banking system, and undermining the ability of public institutions to provide basic services. The effects extend beyond immediate economic consequences: they entail harm to the education and healthcare systems, deepening poverty and food insecurity, and the destruction of material and social infrastructure built up over decades. This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the systemic ways in which Israel undermines the economic ability of Palestinians in the West Bank to sustain life and build a future for coming generations.

Historical Foundations: Subordinating the Palestinian Economy

EVOLUTION OF ISRAEL'S ECONOMIC CONTROL OVER THE WEST BANK

1967-1987
OCCUPATION OF WEST BANK AND GAZA

Subordinating the Palestinian economy to Israel: within 3 years, about 1/3 of the Palestinian workforce employed inside the Green Line

1987-1994
FIRST INTIFADA

Economic protest: commercial strikes, boycotts of Israeli goods, refusal to work inside the Green Line, and a tax revolt. Israel tries to violently suppress the protest

1994-2022
OSLO ACCORDS AND PARIS PROTOCOL

Institutionalizing the subordination of the Palestinian economy to Israel: prohibition on issuing an independent currency, Israeli control over tax collection, and making West Bank banks dependent on Israeli banks

2023-PRESENT
ECONOMIC STRANGULATION

Suspension of tax revenue transfers to the Palestinian Authority, cutting West Bank banks off from the global banking system, sweeping revocation of work permits, and undermining agriculture as an alternative source of income

Since occupying the West Bank, Israel has reshaped the Palestinian economy through a combination of military, bureaucratic, and economic control. In addition to taking control of land, water sources, and natural resources, it imposed a regime of permits and restrictions that subjected almost every aspect of Palestinian economic activity to approval by Israeli authorities - from the movement of workers and goods, through the establishment of factories, drilling of wells, paving of roads, and connection to infrastructure, to exports, imports, and the development of industrial zones. At the same time, Israel encouraged Palestinian labor in the Israeli market, mainly in construction, agriculture, and labor-intensive industry, while restricting avenues for developing independent sources of employment in the West Bank. All this has increasingly subjected income and development options available to Palestinian society to decisions made by Israel.

The First Intifada, 1987

Over two decades, from the Occupation of the West Bank until the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987, Israel turned the West Bank and Gaza Strip into a subjugated economic space: a source of cheap labor for the Israeli economy, a consumer market for Israeli goods, and an area where local production, independent trade, and economic development were systematically restricted. The Palestinian popular uprising against Israeli military rule (the First Intifada) was, among other things, an organized attempt to challenge the mechanisms of economic dependence. The leaders of the uprising organized commerce strikes, encouraged workers to stay away from jobs in Israel and the settlements, initiated a boycott of Israeli products, and called for a tax revolt. At the same time, popular committees worked to provide education and healthcare services, develop local production initiatives, grow vegetables for household consumption, and establish production cooperatives to replace Israeli products. These measures were intended to build a sphere of economic and social independence within the restrictive conditions of Israel's occupation.

The Palestinian economic protest exposed vulnerabilities in the structure of Israeli control. Workers' strikes and mass absences harmed Israeli sectors that relied on Palestinian labor, particularly construction and agriculture, while shop closures and commerce strikes disrupted daily life in the West Bank and this also indirectly affected Israel. The boycott of Israeli products reduced Israeli suppliers' revenues, and the tax revolt directly challenged the idea of Israeli control financed in part by the population under its rule. The economy thus became a key site

of open confrontation. Israel acted to suppress the Palestinian protest by forcibly breaking into shops, confiscating goods and property, collecting taxes by force, closing businesses, making arrests, imposing curfews, and restricting movement. The popular committees, which sought to create a community-based alternative to the mechanisms of control, were outlawed (for more on Palestinian popular committees, see the chapter Social and Political Destruction). This experience demonstrated that economic control is not merely a consequence of the occupation, but one of the fundamental mechanisms upholding it.

The Oslo Accords and Paris Protocol (Economic Annex)

The Oslo Accords and their economic annex, the Paris Protocol (1994), did not dismantle the relationship of subordination. Rather, they established a new institutional framework that entrenched the Palestinian economy's structural dependence on Israel through several mechanisms: denying Palestinians an independent national currency and maintaining use of the Israeli shekel, subordinating the Palestinian banking system to the Israeli system, and controlling foreign trade and the flow of goods in and out of the West Bank. The Protocol left Israel in control of the border crossings, customs and import policy, collection of import taxes and VAT on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, the monetary sphere, and other central mechanisms of economic activity.

At the same time, the division of the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C ensured that most land reserves, natural resources, and development opportunities remain under full Israeli control as part of Area C. The establishment of infrastructure, industrial zones, energy facilities and agricultural development remained subject to an Israeli planning and permit regime. These steps cemented an economic structure that restricts independent Palestinian development while leaving the conditions of economic life in the West Bank under Israel's control. Between 1994 and 1997, Israel imposed a series of closures that cut the West Bank off from the Gaza Strip, prevented Palestinian laborers from reaching their workplaces in Israel, caused unemployment to soar, and sharply reduced economic activity.

Under the "clearance revenue mechanism" established in the Paris Protocol, Israel undertook to collect on behalf of the Palestinian Authority taxes that constitute the bulk of its budget, thereby retaining direct control over the PA's main source of revenue. The clearance mechanism enables Israel to delay or freeze the transfer of revenues and deduct funds as political and economic leverage.

Israel has, indeed, exploited this power to retaliate against international advances by the PA. In 2012, for example, after Palestine was admitted to the UN as a non-member observer state, Israel delayed the transfer of tax revenues as an economic sanction. In 2015, following the PA's accession to the Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court, Israel froze another transfer, estimated at USD 127 million. In 2018, the Knesset passed the Law to Freeze and Deduct Funds Paid by the Palestinian Authority in Connection with Terrorism from Funds Transferred to It by the Government of Israel, which authorizes the government to deduct from clearance revenues sums equivalent to payments the PA makes to the families of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. Implementation began in 2019, with the Security Cabinet deciding to deduct an additional 502.7 million ILS (~ 141.16 million USD) that Israel had collected on the PA's behalf and did not transfer to its treasury.

Over decades, therefore, Israel built up a system for subjugating Palestinians by controlling their economy and using this as a powerful political lever. The Trump administration's 2020 "Deal of the Century" and the vision of "economic peace" followed the same logic of subordination embedded in the Oslo Accords: Palestinians are offered limited autonomy under Israeli control, grounded in the premise that independence, rights, and sovereignty can be substituted with material benefits.

The Shift to Full Economic Strangulation

Since October 2023, Israel's grip on the Palestinian economy has tightened to the point of full economic strangulation that affects every aspect of life in the West Bank.

Under current Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, withholding PA tax revenues through delays and deductions has become systemic policy, openly designed to bring about the PA's collapse as these funds are critical for providing basic public services. In September 2025, Smotrich explicitly declared he would use every means possible "to prevent the danger of a Palestinian state, including bringing about the collapse of the Palestinian Authority [...] through economic strangulation and cancellation of the indemnity provided to the Israeli correspondent banks that engage with it."

Since 2024, deductions and delayed transfers of clearance revenues have significantly increased, amounting to hundreds of millions of shekels a month that are the PA's main

source of income. These measures have produced an ongoing cash-flow crisis that impairs the PA's ability to pay public-sector salaries and retirement pensions and to provide basic services in the West Bank.

In February 2026, Palestinian Finance Minister Dr. Estephan Salameh warned that the Israeli Ministry of Finance's refusal to transfer clearance revenues had brought the PA to an "existential crisis." About two months later, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa announced that tax-revenue transfers had stopped altogether in the preceding year.

Public-sector salaries are withheld for months in the West Bank, and when they are paid, the employees, including teachers and school staff, medical professionals, police officers, and civil servants, receive only a small portion of their wages. In April 2026, PA employees received only 2,000 ILS (~ 650 USD) from their January salaries, three months late. The balance remained unpaid. Meanwhile, Israel is holding approximately 14 billion ILS (~ 425.1 million USD) it has seized from PA revenues since 2019, a sum that grows by approximately 400 million ILS (~ 131.74 million USD) every month.

Strangulation of the Banking System

In addition to withholding tax revenue, Israel's policy has caused severe disruptions to the Palestinian banking system, to the point that it faces the risk of being entirely cut off from the Israeli and global systems. Palestinian banks in the West Bank depend on Israeli banks to clear checks, process credit-card charges, make deposits and wire transfers. Israeli banks offer these services thanks to government guarantees given in the form of an "indemnity letter," which protects Israeli banks from international legal exposure to allegations of facilitating money laundering and terrorism financing. Since October 2023, and especially during 2024-2026, the Israeli government has wielded the renewal of these indemnity letters as a pressure lever. Instead of renewing the letters on a stable, long-term basis, Israel has delayed renewals, threatened cancellation, and extended the arrangement only for short periods, casting Palestinian banks' continued operation into great uncertainty, including their ability to transfer funds to and from Israel and to support normal business activity.

At the same time, because Palestinian banks depend on the Bank of Israel, their ability to absorb excess cash accumulated in bank vaults in the West Bank has been restricted.

Palestinian banks have consequently imposed limits on cash deposits, disrupting business activity. Palestinian business owners are unable to deposit payments received from customers into their accounts and have difficulty making wire transfer payments for orders from suppliers.

Jalal Zayed, 33, a father of two from the Kafr 'Aqab neighborhood in northern Jerusalem who owns a tobacco shop, told B'Tselem:

> "At the beginning of 2025, company representatives and wholesalers began hinting that they would soon stop accepting cash payments in shekels, because the banks had informed them there was a problem with amassing large Israeli cash reserves [...]. We had no choice but to start exchanging the Israeli cash we had for foreign currencies, but that forced us to buy foreign currency from moneychangers, who sell it at rates higher than the official exchange rates, while the companies, through their representatives, and the wholesalers sell only at the official exchange rate. This caused me, on average, a loss of 12-15 ILS (~3.90-4.90 USD) on every 100 USD between buying and selling. These measures forced us, the shopkeepers, to raise the price of a pack of cigarettes by one shekel for consumers [...] to offset the loss incurred from paying in foreign currency."

Later, the option of paying in cash was restored, but at a price:

> "[...] the companies informed us [...] that beginning that day, they would once again accept cash payment in shekels, in exchange for raising the price of each carton of cigarettes, 10 packs of cigarettes, by 10 ILS (~ 3.33 USD). They also gave us another option: cash payment in foreign currency or by bank transfer. [...] for us, the shop owners, it was a better option because it allowed us to sell cigarettes at the old price. But then we discovered that the banks had set a cap on monthly deposits. Before that, there was no upper limit and we could deposit any amount we wanted. The deposit cap they set was 5,000 ILS (~ 1,625 USD) a month, which isn't enough for a commercial shop even for one

> day's payments. After several attempts with the banks, the Palestinian banks agreed to raise my deposit cap to 10,000 ILS (~ 3,250 USD) a month, but that still doesn't solve the problem. The cigarettes alone that I buy every month are worth at least 60,000 ILS (~ 19,525 USD), and even though I use two banks, I can deposit a total of only 20,000 ILS (~ 6,500 USD) a month, 10,000 in each. What am I supposed to do for the rest of the month?" Full testimony

The Current Situation: A Destroyed Economy

The West Bank is currently home to some 3.46 million Palestinians. Although this is a growing population that requires economic development, Israel restricts the infrastructure for such development. Since occupying the West Bank, Israel has effectively controlled most land, water, and natural resources there. Since the Oslo Accords were signed, and particularly in Area C – which comprises more than 60% of the West Bank and contains most land reserves for housing, industry, and agriculture – Israel has retained control over land, planning, and building permits, using them to benefit the Israeli population and the settlements while denying Palestinians access. Between 2000 and 2022, Israeli restrictions on economic activity in Area C caused an annual income loss for the PA, equivalent to approximately 25.3% of annual gross domestic product (GDP), accumulating to USD 50 billion.

Revocation of Work Permits

Since October 2023, Israel has revoked almost all permits allowing West Bank Palestinians to work inside the Green Line, cutting more than 140,000 people off from their main source of livelihood. Average wages in Israel are twice as high as those in the West Bank, and the loss of these jobs caused wage income in the West Bank to plummet from USD 4.3 billion in 2022 to just USD 532 million in 2024. In addition, Palestinian workers who worked inside the Green Line in recent decades now have difficulty finding alternatives in the West Bank's limited labor market, and some are forced to risk entering areas within the Green Line without a permit, exposing themselves to falls from height while trying to cross the Separation Barrier, as well as to violent arrest, exploitation, and even death. According to B'Tselem data, between 7 October 2023 and 30 June 2026, at least 26 Palestinians were

killed while attempting to cross the Separation Barrier for work. Eighteen were killed directly by Israeli forces' gunfire, and at least six were killed while fleeing or after falling off the Separation Barrier while trying to climb over it.

Muhammad 'Amru, 21, a resident of Beit a-Rush a-Tahta who used to work in construction inside the Green Line, said to B'Tselem:

> "I work in construction in Israel, and I usually enter with a work permit. Since the war they haven't been giving permits, and because of the tough financial situation, I had to climb the barrier that Israel built west of my village and go to work without a permit." 'Amru described what happened when he tried to cross the Separation Barrier together with three brothers, Najm a-Din, Salah a-Din, and Nur a-Din from the Shawamreh family: "We got to the barrier around 5:00 P.M. and everything seemed quiet. The driver dropped us off near the barrier and took off immediately. There was a rope ladder at the site, and when one of the brothers began climbing it, the shooting started: "Najm a-Din climbed five rungs, up to about a meter and a half, and then suddenly, shots were fired at us." 'Amru described how Najm a-Din was hit and fell on top of him, and how the shooting continued even when others tried to flee or help: "As soon as Salah a-Din climbed the ladder, the shooting started again, and I saw bullets penetrate his body. Later, "Nur a-Din was sitting on the ground, and he got up to try and help Salah a-Din, but he was hit by a bullet in the head and fell immediately."

Najm and Salah a-Din were killed in the shooting, and their brother Nur a-Din was injured.

While some soldiers evacuated the brothers who had been shot, others detained 'Amru at the scene, handcuffed and blindfolded him, and made him sit on the ground. For two hours, the soldiers abused 'Amru, repeatedly shocking him with a stun gun until he lost consciousness, interrogating him, cursing him, and photographing him. They then put him in a military jeep and drove him to a nearby military base, where 5,400 ILS (~USD 1,470) in his possession were taken from him. He was held in a room, handcuffed and blindfolded, until around 2:00 A.M. During his detention at the base, the soldiers electrically shocked him at least once more. At 2:00 A.M., they handed him a summons for questioning and drove him to the

area of Fqeiqis in Hebron District, where they stopped and threw him out of the jeep. 'Amru managed to reach nearby Khirbet Salamah and called his family. They took him to a hospital in Dura, where he was examined and sent home.

Economic distress drives Palestinian workers to try almost any means ,however humiliating, to support their families .On 13 April ,2026 a garbage truck arriving from within the West Bank was stopped at the Cross-Samaria checkpoint .Footage of the incident revealed approximately 60 Palestinians emerging one after another from the truck's waste compartment, surrounded by numerous Border Police officers pointing their weapons at them and shouting orders.

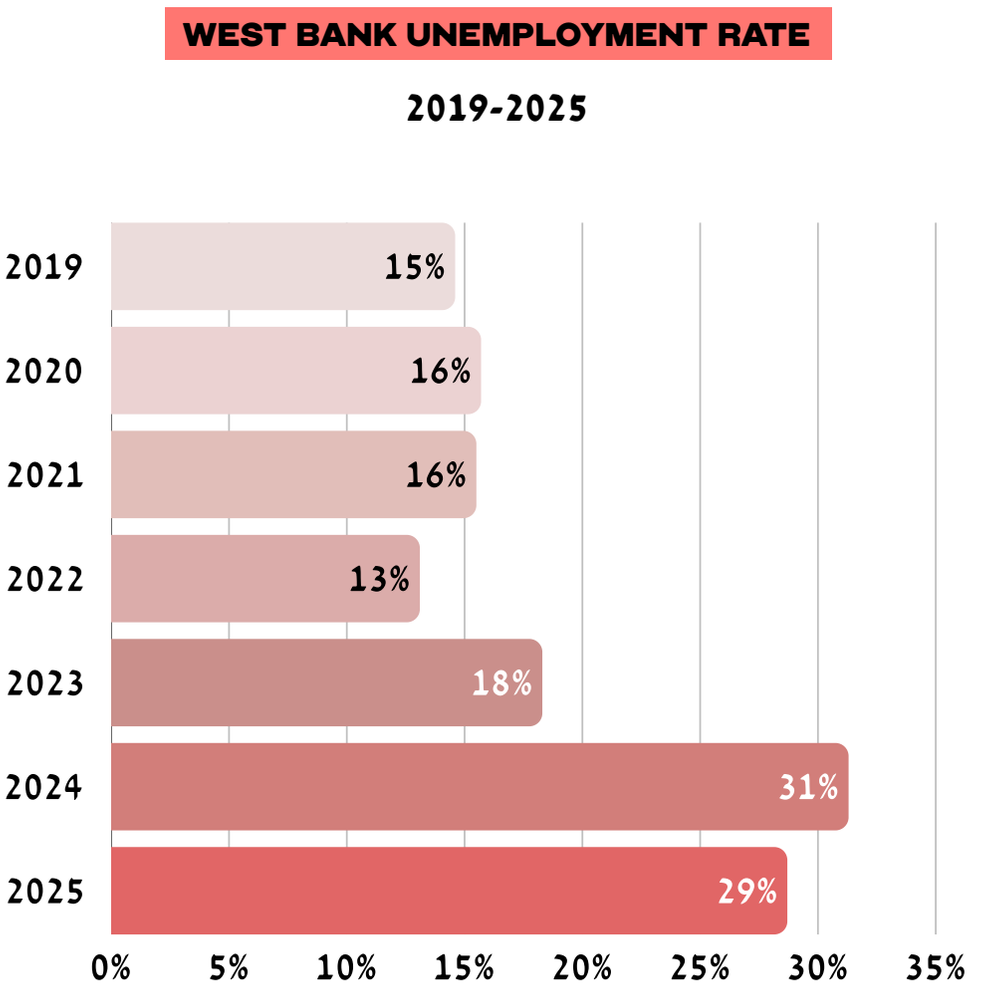
The impact of work permit revocations extends far beyond the harm to the workers themselves. The income they brought home from Israel was a major input that largely sustained the local economy in the West Bank, including businesses, trade, and services. When that income disappeared, those businesses' economic activity suffered. Therefore, Israel's revocation of work permits has affected almost every Palestinian in the West Bank, whether directly or indirectly.

Even before the sweeping revocation in October 2023, the permit regime served as a direct tool of control and collective punishment, and work permits were often revoked arbitrarily, with no explanation or justification. B'Tselem has documented many cases in which hundreds of Palestinians had their work permits revoked solely because of their last name, place of residence, allegations of participating in violent resistance, or even merely concern they might do so. In some cases, relatives of Palestinians harmed by Israeli military gunfire were stripped of their work permits, as in the case of Nabil Ghanem. Families are thus harmed twice: one family member is killed or imprisoned, and others lose their livelihood.

Social Consequences of Revoking Work Permits

Since October 2023, the West Bank has been in the grip of a severe employment crisis, with grave consequences for its social and economic fabric. The permit revocations have left workers and their families without a stable source of income and driven families into deep, prolonged distress: many have taken on debt, sold property, discontinued their education, and cut nonessential expenses. The unemployment rate in the West Bank, which was 13.1% in 2022, surged past 31.3% in 2024 and stood at 28.7% in 2025.

The unemployment crisis has hit young people particularly hard. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2025, nearly half of all young people (between the ages of 18 and (29 in the West Bank were neither employed nor enrolled in education or vocational training programs. Among young people with diplomas or higher, unemployment stood at 36.1%. A breakdown by gender reveals a higher rate for women, 44.4%, compared to 33.8% among men.



source: PCBS

Like work permit revocations, tampering with the PA's clearance revenues financially harmed many West Bank residents. Civil servants, once regarded as a stable middle class,

now receive partial salaries many months overdue. This further erodes purchasing power and causes broader damage to businesses that relied on these consumers.

In these conditions, with livelihoods cut and households left without alternative sources of income, families fall into financial difficulties that leave even basic commodities out of reach. Sahab Baramkah, 56, a mother of five from the town of Burin, described to B'Tselem how she and her family fell into poverty and struggled to buy food after her husband and sons lost their jobs in Israel:

> "I work as a cleaner at the town clinic and receive a monthly salary of 2,000 ILS (~ 655 USD). I also used to work privately in the homes of municipal employees, any woman or family that needed someone to clean the windows, or the carpets, or do any other housework, I would do it. [...]
>
> My husband also had an income. He worked inside Israel. Thank God, our life was fine and we didn't need to take money from anyone. We bought everything we needed, food and drink, clothing and basic necessities. But after the war on Gaza, our lives were upended, and everything changed at once. My husband and our three sons all lost their jobs in Israel. We turned into four families with no source of income, apart from my modest earnings, of which we only keep 1,000 ILS (~ 330 USD) because I'm still paying down a 50,000-ILS (~ 16,400 USD) loan I took from the bank a few years ago to help my son Muhammad, 29, with his wedding expenses. [...] But after his wedding, just a few months later, the war began, and he lost his job after Israel closed its doors to Palestinian workers.
>
> Muhammad tried to sneak into Israel to work, but he was caught several times, and now he's in prison. He was sentenced to eight months in prison for entering Israel without a permit. My son 'Abdallah, 30, a father of four, the eldest of whom is six, was also injured a few months ago when soldiers shot him in the leg as he tried to sneak into Israel to work.
>
> [...] About a month after he was injured, after he recovered, I was surprised when he said he wanted to go into Israel again. The situation is insane; people are dying. I shouted at him: Don't go! You'll die. Are you

> crazy? He replied that he had no money to feed his children. [...]
>
> On top of all that, I don't even know when I'll get my pay, which is very low to begin with, because of the Palestinian Authority's difficulty in paying salaries. There's no way of knowing whether I'll get it after 40-50-60 days. A few days ago, I heard the employees talking about the Palestinian Authority not being able to pay salaries over the next six months." Full testimony

Damage to Infrastructure

Israel has been damaging infrastructure and the material and institutional conditions needed for a society to sustain itself since 1967, including: connections to water and energy, sanitation infrastructure, and the construction of roads, schools, hospitals, and clinics. This control over infrastructure upholds dependence on Israel, forcing Palestinian communities to bear the costs of repairing damage caused by Israel and impairing their ability to maintain stable lives and plan for the future. The basic conditions needed to sustain the existence of individuals, families, and communities have been further compromised since October 2023, amid the overall intensification of restrictions on movement, work, and trade in the West Bank.

Electricity

The Palestinian energy system, including the supply of electricity, depends almost entirely on decisions made in Israel. Building electricity-generation infrastructure requires access to open land, which, as noted, lies mostly in Area C where Israel retains full control over planning and construction. As Israel also controls transmission and connection infrastructure, it decides on extending power lines and connecting to the electricity grid, in many cases disregarding the needs of Palestinian communities.

Both official institutions and settlers suppress local initiatives to develop alternative energy sources. Over the years, Israeli authorities have repeatedly demolished or confiscated solar panels on the grounds they were installed without a building permit. In March 2025, for example, Civil Administration personnel arrived at the Badu a-Mu'arrajat East (Mleiḥat) community in the Jordan Valley, accompanied by soldiers and equipped

with an excavator, and demolished structures and 18 solar panels - demonstrating the effort invested in thwarted even small-scale initiatives for independent energy production.

In other cases, settlers have vandalized solar panels. In October 2025, for instance, settlers invaded the community of al-Meyte east of Tubas in the Jordan Valley. They destroyed about 16 solar panels and damaged others, disabling the community's electricity system. A few days later, another group of settlers invaded a residential compound in al-Farisiyah (Nab'a al-Ghazal), also in the Jordan Valley, and cut the cables connecting solar panels to the batteries that store the electricity. The families living in the compound were left without power.

The West Bank electricity system operates within a cumbersome structure of dependence. Most electricity is purchased from the Israel Electric Corporation, transferred to local grids, and distributed to consumers through Palestinian distribution companies, the Jerusalem District Electricity Company, and local authorities. Consumers pay these local bodies, which are then supposed to transfer payment to Israel for the electricity purchased. The number of entities involved, the fragmentation of connection points, and the difficulty monitoring consumption and collecting payment, together with budget shortfalls, mean that payments are not always transferred in full or on time, allowing debts to the Israel Electric Corporation to accumulate. Israeli authorities settle these debts through deductions from clearance revenues, reducing the sums transferred to the PA by amounts intended to cover electricity debts. This effectively shifts debt generated within the local electricity-supply system to the PA's general budget.

In settlements, meanwhile, Israel develops energy infrastructure and encourages the establishment of industrial-scale solar-generation systems. The result is a system in which the Palestinian population in the West Bank depends on imported electricity, faces restrictions on developing independent infrastructure, and even loses existing infrastructure, while energy projects established in settlements are connected to the Israeli electricity grid and serve the settler population alone.

Cooking Gas and Fuel

Cooking gas and fuel are not produced in the West Bank, and the PA has no control over their points of entry. As these commodities reach the West Bank through import routes controlled by Israel, their supply depends on Israeli mechanisms. In recent years, and especially since

October 2023, recurring gas and fuel shortages have been documented throughout the West Bank. These crises have involved fewer tankers entering, delays in distribution, restrictions on sales, and long lines at gas stations and cooking-gas distribution centers. Residents are forced to wait for long periods to obtain gas cylinders or fuel their vehicles, sometimes unsuccessfully. Uncertainty over supply, compounded by the instability of the power supply, makes it extremely challenging to maintain an ordinary routine.

During the Israeli-American attack on Iran in June 2025, the fuel quota Israel allowed into the West Bank was reportedly cut by 40%. Residents are now forced to wait days for fuel supplies to resume, without knowing whether or when this will occur. Fuel shortages also impede access to work, education, and medical services, compounding the disruptions already caused by movement restrictions. Small businesses, transport services, and farmers are also affected as costs rise and routine economic activity becomes harder to sustain.

Water

Immediately after occupying the West Bank in 1967, Israel took over its water resources. The 1995 Interim Agreement stipulated that Israel would receive 80% of the water from the Mountain Aquifer. In practice, Israel controls the main aquifers and access to drilling, and prevents the development of water infrastructure for the Palestinian population, particularly in Area C. As a result, many Palestinian communities depend on privately purchasing water and transporting it by tanker at a high cost. Urban areas also suffer from severe irregularities in water supply.

Israel claims it is acting in accordance with the arrangements set out in the 1995 Interim Agreement with the PLO. Yet these temporary arrangements were meant to last only five years, and did not account for Palestinian population growth. Since the Paris Protocol was signed in April 1994, the Palestinian population of the West Bank has more than doubled: from about 1.57 million in 1996 to more than 3.46 million in 2026. Yet, Israel continues to limit the quantities of water Palestinians are permitted to pump, which are out of pace with the population growth, forcing the PA to make up the shortfall by purchasing water from Mekorot. Water purchased from Mekorot is a central component of the West Bank's water supply, and the heavy cost has contributed to substantial PA debt.

In addition to restricting the water supply, Israeli authorities directly damage water-storage, drilling, and conveyance infrastructure in the West Bank. Between 2012 and 2022, B'Tselem documented 234 incidents of damage to water sources and infrastructure by official Israeli forces, including the destruction of 112 cisterns, 77 confiscations of water tanks, and dozens of other incidents involving the destruction of water-conveyance networks and reservoirs. In late July 2023, for example, military forces were documented in the village al-Hijrah, South of Hebron, sealing wells used by local residents with concrete, on the grounds that the drillings were illegal, depleted the water supply, or could contaminate groundwater.

Settlers have also repeatedly been documented damaging water infrastructure, including stealing water tanks and blocking access to cisterns. In many places throughout the West Bank, settlers have taken over springs used by local residents and, with military assistance, now prevent or restrict Palestinian access to them. For example, residents of a-Nabi Saleh have long been protesting settlers' takeover of the nearby al-Qaws spring, and residents of Qaryut are repeatedly blocked from local springs by settlers escorted by soldiers.

In the Ras 'Ein al-'Auja area of the Jordan Valley, water sources that served local communities are now controlled by settlers, while channels and pools built by Palestinians have been turned into tourist sites for Israelis only. The takeover of water sources in this area was a key factor in finally driving the local community out in January 2026.

In February 2026, settlers were documented vandalizing infrastructure at a Palestinian pumping station in 'Ein Samia, north of Ramallah, which supplies water to approximately 100,000 residents of more than 20 communities. Security-camera footage shows masked individuals puncturing a water pipe. The damage cut off residents' water supply for more than 12 hours.

Sanitation, Sewage and Wastewater

Since 1967, and especially since the signing of the Oslo Accords, Israel has controlled the framework for planning and construction of sewage infrastructure, wastewater treatment, and waste disposal in the West Bank. In 2009, B'Tselem documented how 90%-95% of wastewater generated in Palestinian communities was not being treated at all. In 2020, only 54% of the Palestinian population in the West Bank was connected to sewage systems,

leaving the rest to rely on cesspits and pay to have them emptied, or leave it to discharge into wadis and open areas, damaging water sources and the environment.

Even where water or sewage conveyance infrastructure exists, when the pipes connecting Palestinian communities run through Area C, every repair or new installation requires approval and coordination with the Civil Administration. In addition, projects for Palestinian-owned wastewater treatment plants have been frozen, delayed, or made conditional on requirements that increase their cost and subordinate them to settlement needs.

Delays in developing sewage infrastructure in the West Bank and neglect of the issue by Israeli authorities have resulted in settlements themselves discharging wastewater onto land and into streams and valleys. In 2007, for example, only 81 of 121 settlements were connected to wastewater-treatment facilities. Approximately 12 million cubic meters of settlement wastewater were treated, while 5.5 million cubic meters were discharged as raw sewage into West Bank streams and valleys. More than a decade later, the situation had not changed substantially: in 2021, approximately 35 million cubic meters of wastewater from about 50 settlements were discharged onto agricultural land and into valleys. Wastewater from settlements and Israeli industrial zones damages farmland and crops, harming farmers' livelihoods and turning Palestinian land into sanitary hazards. Field research and laboratory testing in Wadi Shakhit in the Hebron area and around the Immanuel industrial zone east of Qalqiliyah found that wastewater containing human sewage and animal waste flowed long distances from Israeli settlements, damaged crops, and rendered Palestinian land unusable. The communities studied reported losing up to 70% of their olive crop and 50%-70% of their annual agricultural income.

In the field of solid waste, Israeli planning and control policy severely restricts Palestinian authorities' ability to establish and develop adequate infrastructure. The area of Hebron and Bethlehem, which is home to nearly 1 million people, is a clear case of underinvestment in waste infrastructure: in 2019, approximately 800 tons of waste were generated there every day, most of it dumped at unregulated sites or burned illegally.

Only two sanitary landfills currently operate in the West Bank. There is no landfill serving the central West Bank, and the Rammun waste site planned in 2009 has still not been built, as it is lies in Area C and requires Israeli approval. With no accessible disposal infrastructure nearby and high transport costs, Palestinian local authorities and communities are forced to burn or dump waste. In a 2023 report, Israel's State Comptroller quoted the Civil

Administration acknowledging that the main reasons for Palestinian waste burning are the absence of authorized landfill sites and the inability of Palestinian communities with low socioeconomic status to cover the cost of transporting waste.

Beyond neglect of existing infrastructure and obstructing new development, in recent years the Israeli military has also directly damaged sanitation infrastructure already in place. During Operation Iron Wall, sewage and drainage networks, waste containers, and garbage trucks were damaged in cities and refugee camps in the northern West Bank, impairing access to water and sanitation services for tens of thousands of people. In Jenin District, more than 3.3 kilometers of sewage networks and approximately 21.4 kilometers of water pipes were severely damaged. Similar damage was documented in the Tulkarm and Nur Shams refugee camps, where military activity caused severe damage to 8.4 kilometers of sewage and drainage lines and about 15 kilometers of water pipes on which more than 27,000 residents depend.

Quarries

A significant share of the quarries operating in the West Bank are Israeli-owned, and much of their output, mainly gravel, gypsum, and stone, is appropriated and subsequently used in West Bank settlements and inside the Green Line. At the same time, Israel does not grant comparable permits to Palestinian companies and entrepreneurs, effectively preventing them from developing an independent quarrying industry. The few Palestinian-owned quarries still in operation are subjected to repeat raids by the military and Israeli authorities, in which equipment is confiscated, infrastructure destroyed and operations disrupted, and also to violent attacks by settlers.

Industrial Zones

Approximately 35 Israeli-run industrial zones operate throughout the West Bank, most of them in Area C, and five more are slated for construction in the coming years. Factories and businesses in these zones enjoy access to land, water, infrastructure and to the Israeli market, as well as various economic incentives. Meanwhile Israel prevents the establishment of independent Palestinian industrial zones. Industrial zones in settlements also benefit from inadequate enforcement of labor and environmental law, leaving Palestinian workers exposed to exploitation and to violation of their rights.

Communications and Digital Infrastructure

Israeli control of communications infrastructure impairs Palestinians' ability to connect to the global market and develop initiatives, technology companies, and a local high-tech industry. Fast cellular networks require frequencies and connectivity to international infrastructure. In the West Bank, these components depend to a large extent on Israeli approval. This has kept Palestinian cellular providers technologically behind for years: they were allowed to introduce 3G only in 2018, by which time 4G and 5G networks were already operating in Israel and the settlements, and only in January 2026 did Israel approve the start of an upgrade to 4G. This technological gap limits remote work, e-commerce, digital financial services, online learning, and software development, placing Palestinian entrepreneurs and companies at a permanent disadvantage relative to competitors in Israel and around the world.

Destruction of Private Sources of Income: Harm to Agriculture

For many Palestinian families, local agriculture provides supplementary income, especially since the labor market inside the Green Line was closed to Palestinian workers after October 2023. The main agricultural sectors are olives, grapes, seasonal vegetable farming, and sheep herding. Other families rely primarily on farming, which defines and structures their way of life, sometimes going back generations. Denial of access to grazing areas and farmland by settler violence or military restrictions, the uprooting of fruit trees by the military or settlers, restrictions on access to water sources, destruction of infrastructure, and confiscation of agricultural equipment, inflict severe harm on residents.

Denial of Access to Land

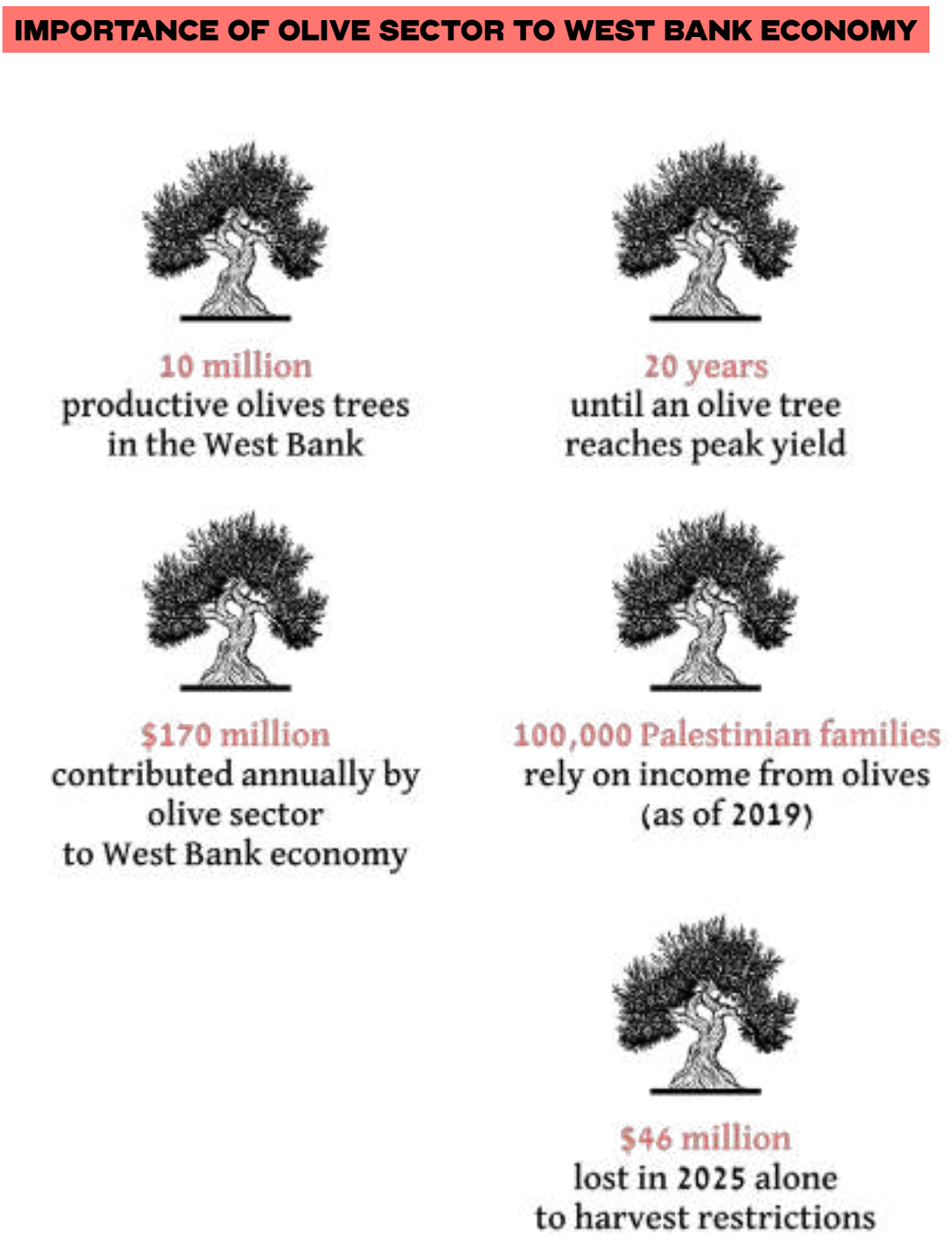
One of the tools Israel uses to dispossess Palestinian farmers of their land is a bureaucratic system that requires them to "coordinate" in advance with the military when they wish to work their own land. Permission to reach plots and work them is generally granted for only a few days, and is often canceled without advance notice or disregarded by soldiers on the ground. In Area C, Israel has declared large olive groves as "state land" or "firing zones" to justify removing the farmers from their land.

Since October 2023, Israel has stepped up its use of these administrative tools to choke the Palestinian economy. In the olive harvest that began that month, the "coordination" mechanism was suspended and farmers were almost entirely prevented from accessing their land. The following year, 2024, for the first time since the "coordination" mechanism was established, the Civil Administration did not publish permitted days for harvest. Farmers who managed to obtain information learned they were now barred from extensive areas they were previously permitted to reach. Other farmers reported the military suddenly canceled their permitted date at the last minute or notified them of their date only after significant delay and at short notice, leaving them unable to prepare properly. In some areas, permits were issued to only a handful of farmers or for periods far shorter than needed. Other areas that had been freely accessible until the war began, including land far from settlements, land adjacent to Palestinian communities, and even land ostensibly under the PA's civil control in Area B, now require "coordination" to access.

These administrative and bureaucratic mechanisms are particularly damaging to farmers whose land lies in the area known as the "Seam Zone" – the parts of the West Bank trapped between the route of the Separation Barrier and the Green Line. Since the barrier was built in 2003, Palestinian farmers in these areas have faced severe restrictions: the barrier has cut through agricultural land, separated families from the centers of their lives, and denied farmers access to land they own. The restrictions intensified further after October 2023. Approximately 19,000 Palestinians in the West Bank with permits to work land west of the barrier were denied adequate access to their plots, sometimes for months at a time. Most of these restrictions were still in place about two years later, although they were initially presented as temporary emergency measures.

In November 2025, the Civil Administration published a new, detailed procedure governing the access of Palestinians in the West Bank to land lying between the barrier and the Green Line. Spanning dozens of pages and imposing a long list of conditions, documents, and bureaucratic steps required for a permit, the procedure transformed access to land from a basic right arising from ownership into a continuing fight for the ability to sustain a life. In January 2026, the High Court of Justice rejected a petition filed by Israeli NGO HaMoked: Center for the Defence of the Individual against the new procedure, ruling that the infringement of farmers' rights was "proportionate to the military commander's duty to maintain order and security." State bodies frequently invoke this rationale to violate Palestinians' rights.

Damage to the Olive Sector



Sources: OCHA, Palestinian Farmers' Union, Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture

Olive trees are a major source of income for tens of thousands of Palestinian families in the West Bank. According to OCHA, in 2019, more than 10 million olive trees provided a primary or secondary source of income for 80,000-100,000 Palestinian families in the West Bank. In fruitful years, the olive sector is valued at USD 160-191 million. Denial of access to land and water sources, destruction of infrastructure, and the uprooting of olive trees, whether by state bodies or settlers, make the cultivation, pruning, plowing, and harvesting of olive trees dangerous and sometimes entirely impossible.

In the harvest season that began immediately after October 2023, more than 96,000 dunams [1 dunam = 0.1 hectares] of olive groves land went unharvested because farmers were denied access. The crop loss that year was estimated at more than 1,200 tons of olive oil, a loss of approximately USD 10 million. The 2024 olive harvest was also severely affected, with about one-third of West Bank olive farmers unable to harvest their crops. The following year, Israeli military actions and settler violence caused USD 103 million in damage to the agricultural sector, approximately 45% of it in the olive sector.

In August 2025, several weeks before the harvest season began, the military uprooted some 3,000 olive trees in the village of al-Mughayir, using private bulldozers operated by settlers hired for the job. The military stated the trees were being uprooted in response to a Palestinian attack on settlers, which required a "clearing operation" for security purposes. Yet some of the uprooted trees did not lie near the road used by settlers, indicating that the operation was largely intended as collective punishment. This was also indicated by the GOC Central Command's description of the uprooting as "shaping operations."

This incident joins other cases of destroying farmland and olive trees by the military and on settlers' initiatives, in Qusrah, Qaryut, and at many other locations. During the November 2025 harvest, hundreds of olive trees were also uprooted in the Wadi Qana area, near the villages of Deir Istiya and Haris and alongside roads used by settlers.

According to B'Tselem data based on information collected from local authorities in the Ramallah area, during November and December 2025, the Israeli military carried out extensive destruction and uprooting of olive groves in the area. In a-Nabi Saleh, northwest of Ramallah, the military used bulldozers to uproot some 40 olive trees. On 15 December 2025, at the military's initiative, between 350 and 400 olive trees were uprooted from land belonging to the village of Budrus. In Qibya, west of Ramallah, eight dunams were destroyed

and approximately 150 olive trees uprooted. In addition, during November 2025, Israeli forces used bulldozers to uproot approximately 2,000 olive trees in Turmusaya, northeast of Ramallah, apparently for the construction of a road to the settlement of Shilo.

The Grape Sector

The spread of outposts, settler violence, and military denial of access to land have also caused systematic harm to grape cultivation, a major source of livelihood for thousands of Palestinian families, particularly in the Bethlehem and Hebron areas. One example is the town of al-Khader, where Israel prevents residents from accessing about 7,000 dunams of vineyards west of the Separation Barrier.

In Halhul, one of the West Bank's main centers of grape and grape-leaf production, farmers' ability to cultivate their land and market their produce has also been extensively harmed. Since October 2023, several new outposts have been established around farmland belonging to Halhul residents. Settlers from these outposts prevent access to land where productive vineyards have grown for years, including by directly assaulting farmers attempting to reach their land.

Jamil Abu Rayan, 43, a father of six from the Wadi al-Jif area north of Halhul, described the harm to the grape sector and the general loss of farming as a source of income and a financial safety net:

> "I own 16 dunams of land - nine in the Ras al-Qadi area and seven in Wadi a-Dur. From 2009 until 7 October 2023, I worked in Israel, but when the war broke out, my work permit was revoked. Since I lost my livelihood, I rented 20 dunams in the Wardan area of Wadi Qaboun, and three dunams in the Khirbet al-Qitt (Wadi al-Amir) area, near where the Carmei Tzur settlement was established. All these plots have grapevines and almond trees. [...]
>
> In May 2025, the settlers established a farming outpost at the entrance to my land near Ras al-Qadi, and they blocked the road in the Wadi a-Shnar area, which is the access road to the rest of my land. Preparing the land in Ras al-Qadi cost me about 400,000 ILS [~ $131,300 USD]. To finance this,

> I sold my land in the Um al-Safa area for 100,000 dinars [~ 400,000 ILS, or $131,300 USD]. In 2023 and 2024, I harvested more than three metric tons of grapes, and during the grape leaf harvest season, I sold produce worth about 50,000 ILS [~ $16,400 USD].
>
> In 2025, after the area was surrounded by outposts, and the settlers blocked access to my plots with iron gates and embankments and attacked and chased us every time we arrived, I lost about 60% of my grape harvest and wasn't able to generate any income from the grape leaves. [...]
>
> Last Ramadan, I went with my family to my plot in Wadi a-Dur, which is in Area B. There, we were attacked by about 25 settlers, who stole our farming equipment - including the pesticide sprayers - and even took my son's toys. They attacked us, beat us, drove us off the land, and threatened to kill us if we returned. Ever since, I haven't been able to return to that land, because every time we try to get there, the army stops us and claims that these are state lands. This year, I haven't been able to prune the vines, weed, plow the land, or spray the vines. All of this could damage the grape harvest, prevent me from earning from the grape-leaf harvesting season, and even kill the vines." Full testimony

Shepherding

Pastoral communities are among the most vulnerable populations in the West Bank. For them, shepherding is not only their livelihood but also a way of life. Even before October 2023, these communities faced the steady contraction of pastureland, movement restrictions, and repeated violence and harassment by settlers and military forces, which together caused devastating economic harm. Since October 2023, Israel has ramped up the pressure to drive these communities off their land by making it increasingly difficult for them to regularly graze their flocks.

Settler violence against these communities has sharply risen since October 2023, in both the frequency and severity of the assaults. This includes physical attacks on shepherds with cold weapons and firearms, denial of access to grazing areas and water sources,

damage to property and infrastructure, and theft of equipment and livestock. In other cases, soldiers stand by with intervening; in others, the soldiers and settlers act together. In recent years, these attacks have expanded from open land to frequent incursions into homes and residential areas, including attacks on residents and damage to property.

Reports of thefts of Palestinian-owned flocks have increased in recent years, particularly in rural areas and pastoral communities. In the first five months of 2026, B'Tselem documented 17 incidents of livestock theft across the West Bank. In the Ras 'Ein al-'Auja area of the Jordan Valley, for example, ongoing settler harassment, including theft of flocks, violence and threats, ultimately led to the forcible displacement of dozens of families.

The average price of a single sheep in the West Bank is currently ILS 2,000-4,000. A flock of 100 sheep can be worth about ILS 300,000 on average. As many shepherds belong to the most socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, the theft of a flock has far-reaching financial consequences. Moreover, the constant threat of settler and military violence disrupts their ability to take their flocks out to graze, forcing them to buy fodder that makes raising livestock financially unviable. For all these reasons, shepherding for a living has become dangerous and nearly impossible. Many shepherds whose families have depended on shepherding for generations are forced to sell their flocks and seek another source of income.

Destruction of Greenhouses

In 2026, the Civil Administration issued dozens of demolition orders for greenhouses in the Qalqiliyah and Tulkarm areas. In Jayus, east of Qalqiliyah, stop-work orders were issued for 52 greenhouses, along with dozens of demolition orders for greenhouses near the Separation Barrier. Some of the greenhouses were built as far back as the early 2000s, yet despite the years that had passed since their construction, they were declared "illegal" for lack of building permits. On 7 May 2026, Israeli forces were documented operating bulldozers that demolished farmers' greenhouses near the village of Bardalah in the northern Jordan Valley as part of earth works, destroying adjacent farmland in the process.

As these greenhouses enable intensive vegetable cultivation, they are core agricultural infrastructures that provide a stable income for many farmers. Their demolition has especially severe financial consequences: building a greenhouse requires an investment

of some ILS 30,000 at least, with tens of thousands more needed to prepare the land. For many households, the greenhouse is the primary and sometimes sole source of income. Therefore, for hundreds of families, these demolitions are not merely property damage but effectively eliminate their possibility to survive financially.

Movement Restrictions and Their Impact on Economic Strangulation

A central feature of life in the West Bank and of Israel's tightening economic noose in recent years, especially since October 2023, is the severe movement restrictions imposed on Palestinians. Beyond their broad social and cultural consequences, these restrictions are a major driver of ongoing damage to the West Bank economy (for more, see the chapter A System of Movement Restrictions).

A March 2025 study by the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) analyzed the "hidden tax" that checkpoints impose on the Palestinian economy. According to the study, movement restrictions cause the loss of 191,146 work hours every day. This lost time translates into a direct economic cost of ILS 2.8 million a day, or ILS 62.2 million a month. The study also found that taking detours significantly increases logistics and fuel costs by an estimated ILS 71,052 a day, accumulating to approximately ILS 22.2 million a year. According to MAS, Nablus District is among the areas most severely affected by the policy of area and road closures. The average travel time required to leave the district has increased by 77.9% since October 2023, adding approximately 42 minutes to each trip.

Isma'il 'Odeh, 41, a father of three from Deir 'Ammar Refugee Camp in Ramallah who is a partner in a building-supplies shop in Bitunya, described the financial damage and disruption of daily life caused by movement restrictions:

> **"Until 7 October 2023, it took me only 20 minutes to get to Ramallah by shared taxi, and the ride cost 7 ILS (~ 2.30 USD). But since October 2023, the military has closed the direct road, and more and more restrictions have been imposed. We're forced to use an alternative road. At first, we took the road that goes through the center of Kafr Ni'ma, which increased travel time and the cost to 10 ILS (~ 3.30 USD). In optimal conditions, this route takes 40 minutes, when there are no traffic jams or checkpoints.**

> After about a year, the military closed that road too, and everyone in the villages of Deir 'Ammar, including Deir 'Ammar Refugee Camp, Beitillu and Jammala, had to travel through more villages, Kharbatha Bani Harith, then Bil'in, Kafr Ni'ma, Deir Ibzi, Bitunya and from there to Ramallah. This route took at least an hour, and the cost of the ride went up to 13 ILS (~ 4.25 USD). This went on until 28 February 2026, when the military closed gates it installed at the entrances to the villages of Deir 'Ammar, Ras Karkar and Kharbatha Bani Harith. Some of the gates reopened about two weeks later, but the gates in Deir 'Ammar and Kharbatha Bani Harith stayed closed.
>
> Residents in our area had two options: One is to take a shared taxi from inside the village of Deir 'Ammar to the Deir 'Ammar gate, which costs 5 ILS (~ 1.65 USD), and from there continue on foot to the Kharbatha Bani Harith Gate, and from there take another ride to Ramallah, which costs 10 ILS (~ 3.30 USD). But walking is dangerous because there are often settlers and soldiers along the way, in the 'Ein Ayoub area. The other option is to travel via the Shebtin/Jammala road, which is a rough road. It's unpaved; there's no lighting, and it's also used for waste disposal and quarries. That drive takes about an hour and a half and costs 18 ILS (~ 5.90 USD).
>
> These days, I have trouble getting to work at our store in Bitunya. I can't go every day anymore, only every other day, because of the high fuel costs and the long trips." Full testimony

The Social Consequences of Economic Strangulation

The mechanisms of economic control described above reinforce one another. Denying employment opportunities reduces household income. Blocking access to natural resources, preventing infrastructure development, and restricting movement all undermine production and trade, weakening the economy as a whole. Damage to agriculture prevents families from relying on farming for food and for an income in times of crisis. Meanwhile, the assault on revenues undermines the PA's ability to provide education, healthcare, and welfare services. Together, these measures erode Palestinian

society's ability to maintain civilian infrastructure, ensure continuity of basic functions, and plan for the future, with broad economic and social costs.

One immediate consequence is the rapid decline in living standards in the West Bank. According to World Bank data, the short-term poverty rate surged from 12% before October 2023 to 28% by mid 2024, while households' ability to meet basic needs dropped sharply. Many families have been forced to adopt survival strategies such as cutting essential spending, selling gold jewelry, taking on heavy debt, and even pulling children out of school and enlisting them in efforts to support the family. Economic harm is thus rapidly translated into direct damage to Palestinian families' living conditions, livelihoods, food security, and ability to plan for the future.

Effect on the Education System

Israel's actions since October 2023 have severely harmed the Palestinian education system in the West Bank, seriously disrupting students' access to schools. The strangulation policy has forced approximately 602,000 public-school students to study from home up to three days a week due to the combination of movement restrictions, delayed salary payments to staff and continuing disruption of operations.

Employment conditions for teaching staff have deteriorated significantly. Because of the assault on PA revenues, most teachers, staff, and support workers receive less than 60% of the salary they received before October 2023. This is a destabilizing factor that undermines the ability to provide regular, high-quality education across the school system.

The consequences of this damage are not limited to the short term. The World Bank estimates that by early 2025, the accumulated damage to the education system in the West Bank amounted to approximately USD 338 million in future income losses, caused by school closures and the shift to remote learning. In the long term, the decline in the number of skilled graduates is expected to reduce human capital, impair access to essential services and resources, and increase the economic vulnerability of the population as a whole.

Damage to the Healthcare System

The West Bank healthcare system has been operating under extreme pressure for years. The economic strangulation imposed on the PA, combined with ongoing violence and movement restrictions, has driven these medical services to a historic low. Direct physical damage from military attacks is estimated at USD 14.6 million. With the PA's deep budget deficit precluding enough funding, most medical centers have shortened their workweek by two days, driven also by the impact of movement restrictions on employees. Meanwhile, medicine warehouses face significant shortages of essential equipment and vaccines.

According to figures reported by Haaretz in June 2026, the Palestinian Ministry of Health's debt to external suppliers reached approximately ILS 2.6 billion, almost as much as its entire 2025 recurrent budget of ILS 2.89 billion. This means the Palestinian healthcare system is operating in a state of chronic insolvency: even when current budgets are allocated, a large share is absorbed by past liabilities rather than used to purchase medicine, pay salaries, maintain medical equipment, or expand services.

The debt has caused system-wide damage across the medical supply chain. About half is owed to private hospitals to which the Palestinian Ministry of Health refers patients, and the other half to about 30 pharmaceutical manufacturers and importers. According to the report, of the 1,260 types of medication the ministry routinely purchased, only 260 remained in its warehouses. The liquid capital of pharmaceutical suppliers, who continue supplying medication on promises of future payment, has also been depleted, making it harder for them to finance purchases abroad. Private hospitals are likewise being pushed into salary cuts, deficits, and overload by the PA's large unpaid debts to them. The assault on the public budget has thus become a crisis throughout the Palestinian healthcare system.

The budget crisis is also harming the medical workforce and the availability of services. Doctors and nursing staff in the public sector receive half their salaries or even less,

while government hospitals provide mainly life-saving treatment whose quality is compromised by shortages of medical staff, medication, disposable supplies, and routine maintenance.

Tal'at Ziyadah, 46, a father of one from the village of Madama in Nablus District who is chair of the nurses' union at Rafidya Hospital in Nablus, described how the budget crisis directly affects the daily lives of staff:

> "Since about 2021, we've been suffering from the cuts and deductions in government workers' salaries. At first, salaries were cut 30%, then 40% and later 50%. The cuts and irregular salary payments continue to this day. [...] The crisis has persisted, deepened and become entrenched over many years. Ninety percent of the workers have taken out bank loans.
>
> [...] Nowadays, without full pay, repaying these loans is an extremely heavy burden for government employees, including nurses.
>
> Whenever we demanded to receive our salaries in full and without deductions and explained our difficult situation to the Ministry of Health, the decision was to reduce workdays because the Palestinian Authority can't pay the salaries in full. At first, the work week was reduced by one day, then two, and later three.
>
> I hear my colleagues' complaints about their financial difficulties and about their inability to go on every day. They buy everything on credit. When part of their salary comes in, they rush to pay what they owe the grocery store, the butcher, the greengrocer and others, and then they repeat the same cycle of borrowing and debt from every direction.
>
> The problem does not end with salaries. The workload on healthcare workers also creates enormous pressure. The number of staff members is steadily decreasing. Since the Palestinian Authority salary crisis began, hiring has also stopped. At our hospital, Rafidya, we are short about 30 nurses. For years, no new positions have been opened, and there are no replacements in cases of death or retirement. Under normal

> circumstances, the medical staff-to-patient ratio is one to four. But today, because of the cut in work hours, the ratio has gone up to one to 20, meaning one staff member for every 20 patients.
>
> [...] We also have a shortage of medical equipment. For example, there is a shortage of IV solutions and other essential medical supplies, because of debts of billions of ILS to pharmaceutical companies and suppliers. Suppliers cannot continue supplying hospitals with medicines and medical equipment because the government can't pay them the money they're owed, because Israel is withholding Palestinian Authority funds. There is a shortage of everything in the hospital, including human resources. There is a shortage of orderlies, sanitation staff and security staff because the Ministry of Health can't recruit new workers. All this leads to a continuous decline in the level of medical services, and the ones who always pay the price are Palestinian civilians." Full testimony

Food Insecurity

The collapse of income sources, revocation of work permits, cuts and delays in public-sector salaries, rising living costs, and harm to agricultural production have all significantly undermined access to food in sufficient quantity and quality for many Palestinians in the West Bank. The World Food Programme's monthly market monitoring for 2025 points to higher food-basket costs and sharp fluctuations in availability and prices, increasing the vulnerability of households across the board, including those already disadvantaged. As a result, survival strategies have become widespread, including switching to cheaper, less nutritious food, reducing dietary diversity, skipping meals, taking on more debt to buy food, and relying on donations. OCHA estimates that in 2024 approximately 700,000 Palestinians in the West Bank needed assistance purchasing food, a 17% increase from the previous year.

The harm to food security is particularly acute in agricultural and pastoral communities, which depend directly on access to land, grazing areas, and markets for their livelihood. Data from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) show that agricultural households in

the West Bank are experiencing a series of cumulative blows to their livelihoods. According to Data in Emergencies (DIEM), a dedicated monitoring tool for collecting data on harm to livelihoods and food systems in emergencies, the main pressures on this population are denial of access to land and grazing areas, threats to safety and freedom of movement that restrict access to markets, and a sharp rise in agricultural input costs. Together, these pressures reduce both the ability to produce food for household consumption and the ability to sell produce and secure income, pushing agricultural communities into a cycle of food insecurity and growing dependence on external assistance.

According to an FAO survey published in October 2025, approximately 34% of agricultural households in the West Bank experienced moderate or severe food insecurity. Within this population, approximately 20,300 agricultural households, about 121,000 people, were identified as needing emergency assistance because of the combined effects of heightened food insecurity, exposure to shocks, and need for support. In a more recent survey from December 2025, the number of agricultural households requiring emergency assistance surged to 72,000 families.

Food insecurity in the West Bank is also producing serious health consequences, particularly among children. According to UNICEF's humanitarian assistance plan, as of 2026 approximately 132,700 children and 63,400 adults in the West Bank and East Jerusalem require nutritional assistance.

Sahab Baramkah, 56, a mother of five from Burin, described the severe food shortage her family is experiencing:

> "I borrow here and there to buy only the most basic commodities. I cook only once a week, on Fridays, and on the other days we eat whatever we have. I get a small container of hummus, or a container of yogurt and bread and things like that. My gas cylinder ran out about a week ago, and I didn't have the money to buy a new one. I had to light a fire using wood. I kneaded dough and made bread, put oil and za'atar from the household pantry on it, and fed my grandchildren and my son 'Abd a-Rahman, 32, his wife and their four children, the eldest is seven and the youngest is 18 months old, and my son Fuad, his wife and their children. What can I do? I can't see them and their

> children going hungry.
>
> We haven't had fruit in the house since the beginning of the year. When my grandchildren ask for fruit, I tell them that I'll buy it only when I get paid. Then, when I get paid, I have to pay what I owe the grocery store, the butcher, the gas cylinder shop and the greengrocer, so I have nothing left, and I go back to borrowing here and there.
>
> My grandchildren hear that their friends have shawarma or hamburgers and ask to eat like them. I tell them, fine, when I have money, I'll buy it for you. What can I do? They're children. And that's besides their requests for clothes. They're teenagers, and they have demands. They're still children and don't understand the situation.
>
> I try to stay strong in front of them, and in front of my sons and their wives, but when I lay my head on the pillow at night, I cry in pain, without stopping, until I fall asleep from exhaustion." Full testimony

D. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DESTRUCTION

Introduction

Since its establishment, Israel has tended to cast any Palestinian political, social and community organizing - particularly when such organizing articulated demands for collective and national rights - as a security threat and a challenge to the political order it seeks to impose. Accordingly, Israel has employed a range of measures to restrict and dismantle civil society organizing, invoking "security" as a justification for its actions. These measures have undermined the basic conditions that enable a society to maintain its institutions, leadership, shared memory and capacity for political action, as well as to claim and exercise its basic rights. Over time, these measures have pushed Palestinians into a fragmented existence, leaving them entirely exposed to violence by the Israeli regime.

After occupying the West Bank in 1967, Israel adopted an interpretation under which the British Mandate-era Defense (Emergency) Regulations, enacted to govern the Palestinian population, apply to the occupied territory. These regulations enabled Israel to outlaw "any body of persons [...] which - by its constitution or propaganda or otherwise advocates, incites or encourages [...] the bringing of hatred or contempt, or the exciting of disaffection against the Government of Israel or any of its ministers in their official capacity," by declaring such groups unlawful associations. In August 1967, the military Order Regarding Prohibition of Acts of Incitement and Hostile Propaganda (Military Order No. 101) established broad and vague definitions of terms such as "incitement" and "support for a hostile organization." To this day, Israel continues to invoke these definitions to prohibit participation in social or political organizing that is not subject to its oversight. The ban also extends to groups not clearly affiliated with a particular political party, including grassroots initiatives, professional associations, parents' committees and workers' committees.

Over the years, Israel has expanded the criminalization of Palestinians through additional military orders. These orders grant the military justice system authority to arrest and imprison Palestinians for taking part in political activity, hold them in administrative detention without trial and, during certain periods, even deport them from the West Bank. In 2016, Israel enacted the Counter-Terrorism Law, which relies on a broad definition of key terms, such as "terrorist organization," "member of a

terrorist organization," and "act of terrorism", which enables sweeping criminalization of Palestinian individuals and organizations.

For instance, the law defines a "terrorist organization" as "a body of persons in an organized and continuous structure that acts, directly or indirectly, to assist another [terrorist organization] given that it has been declared a terrorist organization." This definition greatly broadens the scope of criminalization, as it does not require direct involvement in violent activity or even in explicit political activity. For example, an association devoted solely to distributing food and clothing to families in need could come under the definition of "terrorist organization" if it supports, even indirectly, the work of a kindergarten run by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The mechanism enables Israel to expand the boundaries of criminalization almost without limit and apply them to an ever-expanding network of organizations, institutions and individuals.

Under the same law, in 2021, then-Defense Minister Benny Gantz designated six prominent Palestinian civil society organizations as "terrorist organizations." Among them were the veteran organization Al-Haq, which documents human rights violations against Palestinians, the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, and the Palestinian branch of Defense for Children International (DCI-P). Several amendments to the Counter-Terrorism Law promoted by the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) since October 2023 are intended to further expand the scope of criminalization, in particular, with respect to speech-related offenses, such as the offense of expressing support for a terrorist organization. At the same time, these amendments proposed eliminating the State Attorney's oversight mechanism for opening investigations into speech-related offenses under the law.

Using these and other measures, Israel outlawed more than 411 organizations between 1967 and 2019, including all the major Palestinian political parties and a long list of civil society organizations, grassroots initiatives and community-based associations. Since then, mere association with any of these groups has been enough for Israel to systematically persecute individuals and collectives and subject them to extreme violence under the all-encompassing rationale of "combating terrorism."

In addition to using emergency regulations, military orders and legislation, Israel has intervened directly and aggressively in local political life in the West Bank since 1967, employing blackmail, threats and even the direct removal of mayors and local

council members who refuse to submit to its dictates. Grassroots activists are constantly tracked, abused, threatened and at times blackmailed, often on the basis of information gathered through invasive monitoring and surveillance systems. Throughout the West Bank, soldiers routinely search personal documents, confiscate phones and inspect social media accounts. Israel also suppresses weekly demonstrations held by Palestinian communities across the West Bank, usually by violent means, at times with lethal results. This daily reality of political suppression is reinforced by Israel's incarceration project, now so extensive that it has touched almost every Palestinian household, with most prominent Palestinian leaders and activists in the West Bank imprisoned over the years. Taken together, these practices send Palestinians in the West Bank a clear message: any attempt to resist the Israeli regime will be met with violent repression and possibly devastating consequences.

The Zionist project has sought from the outset to Judaize the land and, as a corollary, systematically erase its Palestinian past. To that end, Israel has waged an ongoing attack on spaces where Palestinian political and social consciousness is formed, including universities, schools, and religious, cultural and community centers. Israel consistently criminalizes markers of Palestinian identity. For example, displaying a Palestinian flag in public can lead to harassment and even arrest by the Israeli authorities, which consistently portray the flag as a symbol of incitement to terrorism against Israel.

As part of its efforts to deny having carried out mass expulsion during the 1948 Nakba, and the refugee status to which the persons expelled are entitled, Israel defines cultural and educational initiatives that address the memory of the Nakba as hostile activity and works to criminalize and prevent them throughout the territory under its control. It is also waging a sustained attack on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is the main body that provides Palestinian refugees with education, healthcare, employment and social services. Israel uses these measures not only to justify the wholesale denial of rights and protections afforded to the refugee population by international law, chief among them the right of return, but also to delegitimize the Palestinian historical narrative.

This chapter reviews the patterns of action Israel employs against Palestinians in the West Bank both as individuals and as a collective. They range from draconian restrictions on personal freedom of expression to violations of freedom of association and the persecution

of civil and political organizations. Taken together, these measures advance the destruction of community, educational, cultural and religious spaces that are central to transmitting Palestinian memory, discourse and identity across generations. This destruction has become especially visible since the right-wing government took office in 2022, and even more so since October 2023. Examples include repeated assertions that "there is no such thing as a Palestinian people"; an unprecedented attack on every marker of Palestinian identity in public space; a campaign by regional councils and settler organizations to flood the West Bank with Israeli flags, Stars of David and even billboards put up by the settler campaign "Fighting for Life" reading in Arabic, "There is no future in Palestine"; and the intensifying campaign against UNRWA, which culminated in October 2024 with the passage of two laws dramatically restricting and even banning the agency's operations. All of these developments directly continue nearly eight decades of ethno-national repression, whose cumulative effects are now enabling the most profound form of social and political destruction: eliminating the conditions for Palestinians to exist as a collective that shares a history and a future.

Suppressing Freedom of Association

In 2016, then-Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, acting on a recommendation from the Shin Bet, signed an order declaring "al-Hirak a-Shababi" an unlawful association in Israel under the Defense (Emergency) Regulations. Israel banned it from operating, claiming it was funded and directed by Hezbollah and Iran. In the following period, Israel placed in administrative detention a number of young Palestinian activists for alleged affiliation with it. Yet in practice, there was no such association. The term "al-Hirak a-Shababi" was used to describe various social or political activities led by separate groups of young Palestinians across a broad range of political affiliations and geographic locations throughout the West Bank and even in the western Negev inside Israel. Al-Hirak a-Shababi was a sociopolitical phenomenon rather than a specific organization.

The case of al-Hirak a-Shababi illustrates Israel's longstanding policy of criminalizing Palestinian grassroots organizing in the West Bank. Since 1967, it has targeted many organized efforts to support the communities and groups most vulnerable to Israeli violence. In this context, immediately after the First Intifada began, Israel outlawed the Palestinian popular committees, alleging ties to illegal Palestinian guerrilla organizations, including PLO factions.

The Palestinian popular committees emerged during the 1970s and 1980s in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, building on a network of community initiatives that began after 1967. These committees included a wide range of women's organizations, workers' organizations, labor unions and professional associations helping communities with everyday problems, including violence and land theft by the Israeli regime. These groups and others ran alternative schools when Israel shut down the education system, established cooperatives and platforms for agricultural work and local production, operated aid and food-distribution networks, and provided protection and resources for Palestinian workers, including those working in Israel without basic labor rights. They aimed, among other things, to create community-based alternatives to the forced dependence on Israel. Drawing connections between the everyday hardships of Palestinians and the structure of Israel's occupation regime, the committees cultivated an understanding that the struggle for a better everyday life depends on the Palestinian national struggle.

These organizations became central to socioeconomic life in the West Bank and key actors in pursuing political, economic and national independence. They helped lead the broad civil resistance of the First Intifada in the 1980s through strikes, boycotts of Israeli goods and refusal to pay taxes. The Israeli Ministry of Defense identified them as a threat to Israeli rule and claimed they served a "a double aim: to impose by violent means the orders of the PLO and the uprising's leaders on the population and to undermine the Israeli authorities [...] and to create alternative mechanisms instead." Israel placed more than 200 members of these committees in administrative detention and deported others from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

While violently suppressing popular resistance during the First Intifada, Israel tried to impose alternative local leadership on the residents of Palestinian villages. A blatant example was the "Village Leagues" - groups of residents, which Israel supported based on the assumption that reinforcing loyalty to local communities would detract from commitment to the national cause. Israel promised villages that joined the leagues benefits in the shape of access to valuable resources, including broad approval for family reunification, connections to water and electricity infrastructure, and road paving in the villages.

The Shift from Associations and Committees to Formal Organizations

The Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 accelerated a shift in Palestinian discourse from liberation and resistance to state-building. Members of the popular committees joined PA institutions, and many of the committees scaled back activities or became NGOs, forcing them to adapt to international funding standards by softening their political edge. Nevertheless, activist groups continued to drive local struggles through the popular committees, including protests against the Separation Barrier, settlements and outposts, and initiatives to safeguard and protect communities from settler violence.

Israel works to criminalize these forms of civil organizing and shut them down, using threats to deter Palestinians from any form of civil, social and political activity. This method is evident in the repeated arrests of Munther 'Amira, who in recent years has been chair of the popular committees and chair of the board of the youth center in 'Aydah Refugee Camp in Bethlehem. The center itself has repeatedly been subjected to Israeli military violence. According to Haaretz, in 2021, a senior Civil Administration officer who headed the District Coordination and Liaison Office for the Bethlehem area threatened 'Amira, told him he was "under her surveillance," and sent him a photograph of him shaking hands with a soldier, along with a demand to stop "incitement on the ground and online." Amira said the photograph reached Palestinian security personnel even though he had not circulated it himself.

For decades, and with greater intensity since the 2000s, the Israeli regime has used its various arms to repeatedly raid Palestinian civil society offices in the West Bank, arrest staff, prevent them from traveling abroad, threaten them and wage a broad delegitimization campaign to undermine their international credibility. In recent years, Israel has also gradually restricted the entry of international aid and development staff into the West Bank by denying, delaying or refusing to renew visas and entry permits. The six Palestinian organizations designated "terrorist organizations" in 2021 all work to document and disseminate information about human rights violations against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and to assist victims. Addameer provides legal aid to prisoners, collects data on imprisonment and administrative detention, and works to end torture; Al-Haq documents human rights violations against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories; and the Palestinian branch of Defense for Children International

(DCI-P) monitors killings of children, arbitrary arrests, torture, forced confessions and unfair trials of children. The remaining three organizations were the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC), and the Bisan Center for Research and Development. Later that year, it was revealed that the military had hacked the phones of six Palestinian human rights defenders, three of whom worked for the organizations listed above, using Pegasus spyware, which provides unrestricted access to a phone's camera, microphone, and incoming and outgoing text messages.

A major investigative report published in 2024 revealed that for almost a decade, since the State of Palestine joined the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague in 2015, Israel maintained dedicated teams within Military Intelligence, the Shin Bet, Mossad, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Strategic Affairs to monitor the ICC investigation into war crimes in the Occupied Territories, anticipate what material would be submitted to the prosecutor, undermine its credibility, and obstruct or delay the proceedings. According to the investigation, Israel also intimidated and threatened the prosecutor in an effort to stop the investigation. Much of this effort targeted Palestinian civil society organizations involved in building the evidentiary foundation for the proceedings, among them Al-Haq, Al-Mezan and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR). These organizations submitted material on settlement expansion and home demolitions as a form of collective punishment, as well as testimonies about bombings in the Gaza Strip and problematic conduct by senior Israeli officials. The targeting damaged not only their reputations but also their ability to collect testimony, while compromising witnesses' privacy and safety. "People are afraid to file a complaint [to the ICC] or to mention their name because they fear being persecuted by the military, or losing their entry permits," veteran PCHR lawyer Hamdi Shaqura told the investigation's authors. "A man in Gaza who has a relative sick with cancer is scared the army will take his entry permit and prevent his treatment – this sort of thing happens."

October 2023 Onward: Unprecedented Targeting of Collective Organizing and Accelerated Closure of Civil Society Organizations

Since October 2023, Israel has intensified its attack on almost every form of Palestinian organizing and association in the West Bank. Grassroots and community groups, as well as organizations that protect workers, people in need and children, have faced repeated raids on their offices, forced closures, systematic harassment, and the arrest of employees, volunteers and activists without cause. In April 2025, for example, Israeli forces closed the East Jerusalem office of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions and arrested its office secretary, Fawzi Sha'ban. The previous month, Israel prevented elections for the federation's executive committee and for the leadership of several labor unions. Several months later, in October 2025, Israeli forces broke down the doors of the federation's offices in Nablus, vandalized the premises and looted equipment.

Ahmad Dweikat, 50, a father of four from Nablus, told B'Tselem how, in 2026, Israel shut down the Madid Association, which he had co-founded in 2010 to assist women, children, persons with disabilities and families in need:

> "In the beginning, we provided counseling and emotional support services. Over time, we noticed that the main cause of distress for most of our recipients was economic, so we expanded our activities and added humanitarian aid and charity, based on a concept of mutual responsibility and social solidarity. [...] The association provides assistance to women, children, people with disabilities, and families without a breadwinner. We distribute food packages that include basic staples – including rice, sugar, lentils, oil, and other products – as well as clothing ahead of holidays and at the start of the school year. We also run a program for distributing new backpacks and school supplies to students in need, and a program for distributing meat for Eid al-Adha to families living in poverty.
>
> On 14 May 2026, the army raided the association's offices [...] I entered the office and saw that the soldiers had turned the place upside down. They confiscated four desktop computers, a laptop, flash drives, and four books of receipts, as well as about 70,000 ILS in cash. Part of that money was intended for expenses for orphans, part was money that'd

> been donated and earmarked for purchasing meat for the Eid al-Adha – for which fundraising was still ongoing – and another part was intended for the association's routine expenses and emergencies. The entire sum was confiscated. I saw a few orders posted on the door of the building, in Hebrew and Arabic, including a military order to close the organization. The orders alleged that our nonprofit provides services to an illegal organization, receives funds from an illegal organization, makes use of the assets of an illegal organization, holds property used for producing weapons, and receives money from arms trading.
>
> I was shocked when I read these things. I don't understand how we can be accused of such things. If there's any truth to them, why aren't we being arrested? I've been the chairman of the board of directors and the acting director of the nonprofit for several years now. The organization has a board of directors, a general assembly, and an orderly organizational structure, and its activity is well known throughout the city. Our entire purpose is to help those in need and to ease, to the best of our ability, their daily hardship.
>
> The closure of the organization hurts children, women and families without a breadwinner, and people with disabilities who rely on such associations, all of whom are among the most vulnerable populations. Some people come to us on foot, after walking long distances, just to get a hot meal for their children and family members. People come from villages and refugee camps seeking assistance, even if it's just a hot meal, as was the case during the month of Ramadan. [...] No one has been spared from the effects of the war. Many families, who previously lived in relative comfort and stability, have fallen into poverty after completely losing their source of income. Many workers who were employed in Israel or the West Bank lost their jobs and were unable to find alternative sources of income. P.A. employees, who have not received their full salaries for years, have also become a new group in need of our assistance. We're lost and don't know how to get this decision overturned." Full testimony

Israel has also greatly stepped up arrests of activists and human rights defenders and has frequently raided NGO offices in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, causing extensive property damage and arbitrarily arresting staff. At 5:00 A.M. on 17 September 2024, soldiers raided the home of Tahrir Jaber, director of the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC). Two weeks later, on 1 October 2024, soldiers raided the union's headquarters in al-Bira, confiscated items and issued a closure order for the premises. In early December 2025, after weeks of harassment and public incitement by settlers and their representatives, Israeli forces raided the offices of the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), which provides support to Palestinian communities and farmers facing violence by the Israeli regime, in al-Bira and Hebron. Reports stated that during the raid, soldiers detained staff for hours while they were handcuffed and blindfolded, arrested eight of them, vandalized and confiscated equipment, and sealed the offices' main entrances.

In September 2025, the US government imposed crippling sanctions on three Palestinian human rights organizations – Al-Haq, Al-Mezan and PCHR – because of their direct involvement in ICC investigations. The organizations reported that their bank accounts were closed, leaving them unable to receive funding and pay staff. In April 2026, the Palestinian branch of Defense for Children International (DCI-P) announced that it was shutting down.

Suppression of Demonstrations and Nonviolent Protest

After Israel occupied the territories in 1967, it applied the military Order Regarding Prohibition of Acts of Incitement and Hostile Propaganda (Military Order No. 101), which requires a permit from the military commander for any gathering of more than ten people that "can be construed as political," whether held in public or in private. Since then, Israel has prevented nonviolent demonstrations in the West Bank, including by issuing "closed military zone" orders for areas where demonstrations are due to take place, without having to provide any formal justification. Israel also systematically arrests political figures involved in organizing and leading protests, and military forces routinely use extreme, and often lethal, methods to disperse demonstrations. The military's documented use of the term "chief instigators," embedded in its open-fire regulations, illustrates the systemic encouragement of disproportionate force against protesters: To disperse demonstrations, soldiers are permitted to use lethal force against anyone identified as a "major" leader of the protesters, even when the individual poses no danger to the forces.

In addition to live fire, the military routinely uses tear gas, stun grenades, "Skunk," water cannons (a foul-smelling liquid used by Israeli forces for crowd control), and rubber-coated metal bullets ("rubber bullets") to disperse demonstrations. These designated crowd-control measures are often used in ways that can make their impact lethal. Direct fire of tear gas canisters and inhalation of tear gas, for example, have caused severe injuries and deaths among protesters. The same is true of "rubber bullets." According to B'Tselem data, from the beginning of the Second Intifada in September 2000 through June 2026, at least 24 Palestinians from the West Bank were killed by "rubber bullets," 14 of them minors.

In light of the genocide in the Gaza Strip, Israel expanded an already permissive open-fire policy, including in the suppression of demonstrations in the West Bank. Immediately after October 2023, live fire has been used more extensively at demonstrations in place of "rubber bullets" and other means. According to OCHA, 41% of people injured by military and settler violence in the West Bank from 7 October 2023 to the end of that year were injured at demonstrations or in direct or indirect connection with them. One-third of these injuries were caused by live fire, compared with 9% of all injuries in the first nine months of that year. B'Tselem data show that in just seven months, from 7 October 2023 to mid-May 2024, Israeli forces killed at least 28 Palestinians, including 11 minors, in demonstrations or in connection with them. By comparison, over roughly the 13 years before that, beginning with Operation Cast Lead in January 2009, Israeli forces killed at least 66 Palestinians during demonstrations or in connection with them. Two others were killed by settlers, and one by an Israeli whose status as a soldier or civilian B'Tselem could not determine with certainty. Twenty-three of those killed were minors.

All the Palestinian demonstrators killed in the West Bank after October 2023 were taking part in protests against the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip, with one exception: a demonstration marking the Nakba in May 2024. This was the last killing documented at or in connection with a demonstration through July 2026. For example, after hundreds of displaced Gaza residents were killed in an explosion at al-Ahli (al-Ma'madani) Hospital in Gaza City on 17 October 2023, solidarity demonstrations were held in several locations in the northern West Bank. The military suppressed them using extensive live fire, tear gas canisters and stun grenades. Palestinian Authority security forces also took part in suppressing these demonstrations, their involvement let to the deaths of four Palestinians, including Razan Nasrallah, a 12-year-old girl from Jenin.

The fact that no Palestinian demonstrators were killed by Israel in the West Bank from May 2024 to July 2026 does not indicate military restraint. Rather, the demonstrations themselves subsided. A wave of arrests of Palestinian leaders in the West Bank, combined with the Israeli military's escalating violence against protesters, caused solidarity demonstrations with Gaza residents to almost entirely disappear over the course of 2024. The weekly demonstrations against the occupation held for years in villages and towns throughout the West Bank also gradually declined.

The town of Beita, south of Nablus, illustrates the escalating violence against protesters in the West Bank. Beita is surrounded by settlements and outposts, military checkpoints and Israeli-only roads, and has for decades stood at the forefront of the Palestinian struggle against the occupation and Israel's takeover of land for outposts. In less than a year, between May 2021 and February 2022, seven Palestinians were killed during weekly demonstrations against an outpost established on the town's land. According to UN figures, approximately 180 people were injured by live fire at those demonstrations, about 1,000 by "rubber" and sponge bullets, and more than 4,200 by tear gas inhalation. Residents were also subjected to extensive collective punishment by the military, including night raids, closure of the entrance to the town, destruction of residents' olive groves with military bulldozers, and revocation of work permits. The demonstrations in Beita stopped around the time the Israeli attack on Gaza began. They resumed on a smaller scale in mid-June 2024, after Israel declared 66 dunams [1 dunam = 0.1 hectares] of town land "state land" as part of the process of legalizing the Evyatar outpost. On 6 September 2024, soldiers shot and killed Turkish-American protester Aysenur Ezgi Eygi while she was taking part in a demonstration against the outpost. During those months, the military began preventing demonstrations at the site altogether, blocking protesters from moving toward the town's outskirts or the main road as they had in the past.

The decline of demonstrations in Kafr Qadum, Qalqiliya District, brings into even sharper relief the ways Israel has undermined freedom of protest since October 2023. In the early 2000s, as the settlement of Kedumim expanded, the military blocked the only proper, paved, road leading to the village. The closure isolated the village and forced its thousands of residents to use dirt roads or agricultural land to enter and leave. About five years later, the Palestinian Authority succeeded in paving a bypass road, which significantly increased travel times. Against this backdrop, and after Israeli authorities repeatedly failed to respond to residents' demands to reopen the old road

connecting the village to the Jit Junction, in 2011, Kafr Qadum residents began holding weekly nonviolent marches and demonstrations. They continued for about 12 years and included, among other things, marches toward the road leading to the closed gate opposite Kedumim, Palestinian flags and signs, and chants demanding that the road be reopened. When military forces approached to disperse the protesters, young people would throw stones at them in an effort to drive them back.

A.A., a resident of Kafr Qadum, described to B'Tselem how the village's weekly demonstrations faded away:

> "The organizers of the weekly protest took great care to impose restrictions designed to preserve the nonviolent nature of the protest. But the military responded with excessive force and violently suppressed them, which led to clashes. Over the years, hundreds of protesters have been injured by rubber-coated metal bullets, live fire, and tear gas inhalation. Two young men lost eyes after being struck by rubber-coated metal bullets fired by soldiers. In 2019, soldiers shot a nine-year-old boy, 'Abd a-Rahman Yasser a-Shteiwi in the head, and his injury resulted in complete paralysis of both his arms and both his legs. The army has also taken other punitive measures against protestors, arresting more than 250 young people for various periods of time. The spokesperson for the weekly protest, Mr. Murad Shteiwi, was arrested about 10 times over the 12 years that they were held, most recently in October 2025. Still today, he remains in administrative detention.
>
> Following October 7th, and particularly during the first and second weeks, the protest organizers noticed that the Israeli military's policy had changed, and that it was using excessive force and new rules of engagement. This was also reflected in the army's widespread deployment across the West Bank, an increase in fatalities in the northern West Bank, the establishment of additional military checkpoints, and extensive raids and incursions in various areas of the West Bank. All of this occurred alongside the significant escalation and the intense war in the Gaza Strip. Due to these alarming developments, the demonstration organizers and the residents of Kafr Qadum decided to suspend the weekly protest out

> of concern for the safety and wellbeing of the protestors. [...] The last demonstration took place on 20 October 2023. After 12 years of protest, the residents' demand to open the road to make life easier for residents has yet to be met." Full testimony

Attacks on Spaces Where Collective Consciousness Is Formed

Against the backdrop of the devastation Israel has inflicted on the education system and community, cultural and religious life in the Gaza Strip, its attack on similar spaces in the West Bank has intensified. Tighter movement restrictions, the growing number of joint incursions by settlers and soldiers into these institutions, and targeted attacks on religious and cultural figures, students and education staff have restricted access to spaces where community members meet to learn, worship, engage with culture or spend leisure time together, and have made reaching these spaces dangerous. In testimonies collected by B'Tselem field researchers, witnesses described different reasons they had stopped going to them. Some avoid them because of the many movement barriers and the dangers involved in travel; some are afraid to take part in collective activities for fear of criminalization and arrest; and others are dealing with trauma or mental exhaustion and therefore refrain from participating. For many, leaving home has become an almost impossible task.

Community, Culture and Religion

In December 2024, Israeli forces raided the youth center in 'Aydah Refugee Camp in Bethlehem. Security camera footage shows soldiers examining books, shirts and children's drawings and confiscating items bearing markers of Palestinian identity. In February 2025, police raided the Educational Bookshop in East Jerusalem, confiscated books bearing Palestinian symbols, and arrested the owners, Mahmoud and Ahmad Muna, on suspicion of "disturbing public order." In November 2025, police raided al-Hakawati Theater in East Jerusalem and violently dispersed a children's musical performance, claiming the event had been held without a permit and produced in connection with the Palestinian Authority. The common thread among these institutions is their prominent role as hubs for creative activity, intergenerational community dialogue, identity formation and the preservation of a Palestinian cultural and national narrative. They also serve communities deeply affected by

the ongoing routine of Israeli violence in the West Bank. The youth center in 'Aydah Refugee Camp, for example, offers children and young people psychosocial and educational support, historical tours of Palestinian villages in the area, participation in the olive harvest, and art workshops. Performances at al-Hakawati Theater, also known as the Palestinian National Theatre, address, among other things, Palestinian history and the Palestinian community's connection to the land.

Israel's broader attack on Palestinian identity and culture also includes attacks on religious practice, religious institutions and worshippers' rights. In recent years, military forces have routinely raided mosques throughout the West Bank. At the same time, settlers routinely set fire to and vandalize mosques, sometimes in conjunction with military forces. During a single week in mid-June 2026, for example, settlers set fire to mosques in at least three villages in Ramallah District. In Burqah, settlers broke down the mosque doors and set fire to the entrance while worshippers were inside; residents managed to extinguish the fire before it spread. Several days later, settlers set fire to mosques in Jaljiliya and Mazari' a-Nubani. In Jaljiliya, they sprayed Hebrew graffiti on the mosque walls, including "Night of the Mosques," "Revenge," and "Greetings from the Hilltop Youth."

In 2024 and 2025, collective restrictions were imposed on the entry of Palestinians from Israel and East Jerusalem to al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan. According to police data published by Ir Amim in early 2026, the number of Muslim worshippers at the compound in 2025 was less than half the figure recorded a decade earlier. Meanwhile, the number of Jewish worshippers, including several Jewish-Israeli public officials, continued to rise with government approval and encouragement, in ongoing violation of the status quo at the compound.

According to Ir Amim, the dramatic decline in the number of worshippers at al-Aqsa Mosque during 2025 reflects a combination of official restrictions, barriers imposed in practice and systematic deterrence aimed particularly at young people, who also receive threatening messages from Israeli forces through unofficial channels. Extensive police violence against young Palestinians attempting to reach the site for prayer was also documented in 2024. Israeli authorities were also reported to have threatened Muslim religious officials, arrested them and barred them from entering the compound. The situation escalated further in 2026, when the police refused to come to the Waqf offices, the Muslim administration that manages the compound, to coordinate prayer times and food delivery to al-Aqsa during

Ramadan. This decision came on top of hundreds of administrative exclusion orders issued by the police barring Palestinians from the al-Aqsa area shortly before Ramadan, including 33 Waqf employees; the administrative detention of five additional Waqf employees; a cap of 10,000 Palestinians permitted to attend Friday prayers at the site; and an aggressive police entry into the mosque compound during the first Tarawih prayer.

The Education System: Schools and Academia

Schools and academic institutions are important spaces for shaping historical, political and social consciousness. They provide a unique setting in which children, teenagers and young adults can exchange ideas with their peers, transmit knowledge across generations, build identities and even develop leadership. Beyond formal education, schools and campuses throughout the West Bank have over the years given rise to student councils, unions and other forms of organizing that involve not only students but also their families and communities, including parent councils.

Since 1967, and with increasing frequency since the 1980s, Israel has repeatedly disrupted and periodically shut down schools and academic institutions in the West Bank, often as a form of collective punishment. At the height of the First Intifada, for example, Israel ordered all schools in the West Bank closed. In response, representatives of the popular committees, together with teachers and residents, tried to establish alternative teaching arrangements in homes, mosques and courtyards. The Israeli military suppressed these initiatives, claiming they could lead to "public disturbances." During both the First and Second Intifadas, many institutions were forced to stop operating because of movement restrictions and curfews imposed by Israel in the West Bank. In other cases, armed soldiers raided institutions, sometimes using live fire, tear gas and stun grenades and at times causing extensive damage to buildings and equipment. In some cases, educational facilities were taken over entirely and converted into military posts. Over the years, Israel has arrested university and school students, representatives of school and university student associations, lecturers and teachers. Israel has also demolished dozens of structures on campuses, generally on the grounds that they were built without permits.

Censorship of Textbooks

Until the Oslo process, primary and secondary education in the West Bank relied on Jordanian textbooks. The Israeli authorities heavily censored these books. The word "Palestine," for example, was systematically removed, maps were erased, and other content defined as Palestinian-national in character was omitted. As part of a campaign to deport Palestinian residents who publicly opposed Israeli rule during the early years of the occupation, Israel also deported school principals who protested the censorship of textbooks.

Textbooks developed under the Palestinian Authority, in cooperation with UNESCO, after the Oslo Accords largely reflected an effort to preserve and transmit a Palestinian narrative to young people, including by presenting the 1948 war as the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe. Israeli territory was often referred to in these books as the "1948 lands" or "the area inside the Green Line," and Palestinian cities within it were called by their Arabic names. Israelis were portrayed mainly through Palestinians' everyday encounters with them, as soldiers or police officers present in the streets and at checkpoints, or during family visits to incarceration facilities. Over the years, Israeli public officials have consistently claimed that PA textbooks are rife with incitement to violence against Israelis and even antisemitism. Research that examined the curriculum in depth found that the books did contain "emotionally charged portrayals of Israeli violence" and incomplete or partial portrayals of Israel, Judaism and Zionism, but did not contain incitement to terrorism, demonization of Israelis or Jews, or calls to harm them. Alongside Israel's direct attack on the Palestinian education system, the pressure it exerted internationally also harmed external funding. Between 2012 and 2022, for example, some European Union aid to the Palestinian Authority was frozen pending changes to the curriculum.

In East Jerusalem, Israel has for years subjected Palestinian educational institutions to censorship and intense scrutiny while withholding funding. Israel does not hide this censorship. In 2018, for example, the Israeli Ministry of Education decided to encourage East Jerusalem schools to expand the use of the Israeli curriculum and give it priority over the Palestinian one by providing "physical and pedagogical incentives." The measure was established as one of the stated goals of the five-year plan for the "integration of East Jerusalem residents into Israeli society and the Israeli economy." In 2022, the Israeli Ministry of Education required East Jerusalem schools to use a version of Palestinian Authority textbooks that had been censored by the Jerusalem Municipality, under threat

of losing their permanent licenses. According to a Ministry of Education statement, the "inciting content" found in those textbooks included "glorification of prisoners and their struggle against the State of Israel, fabrications about denying treatment to patients and deliberate [Israeli] harm to medical teams, accusations of [Israeli] responsibility for the water crisis in the PA, and grave allegations of killing, expulsion and military massacre."

In January 2026, a law was passed barring teachers who studied education in the Palestinian Authority from working in the Israeli education system. As enacted, the law provides that teachers trained to teach the Palestinian curriculum will no longer be eligible for teaching positions in East Jerusalem schools. In a Knesset Education Committee debate, MK Amit Halevi offered this explanation: "East Jerusalem Arabs can decide. If they want to realize their national identity, there are other countries. Not in Jerusalem, not in our capital city… that is the framework of the discussion."

The Education System Since October 2023

Since October 2023, the damage Israel inflicts on the West Bank's primary and secondary education system has reached record levels after decades of disruptions and periodic shutdowns by the state. This reality has repercussions for the intellectual, social and emotional development of many children and teenagers in the West Bank, who are left with no stable routine or consistent access to the support system provided by teachers and school counselors or to spaces where they can meet and play with their peers.

When children remain out of school for an extended period, their learning tends to regress. It is therefore likely that this dramatic disruption will have lasting effects on children in the West Bank. The effects are expected to extend beyond the students themselves, affecting the community as a whole, its human and economic development and, consequently, its ability to survive.

During the 2023-2024 school year, between 8% and 20% of schools in the West Bank were not operating at any given time because of Israeli military activity, settler violence and extreme movement restrictions. Parents and teachers from across the West Bank testified that the expanding checkpoint network, increasingly unpredictable opening hours, and temporary roadblocks set up by military forces and settlers had made reaching schools almost impossible.

Because of movement restrictions and deepening economic hardship, schools throughout the West Bank significantly reduced in-person learning and, for extended periods, canceled it entirely. From February 2024 through the end of the school year, for example, in-person classes were sharply reduced throughout the West Bank and in many places were held only two days a week. Residents told B'Tselem that many children cannot access educational content on remote-learning days because they do not have the necessary technology. In addition, many parents are forced to remain at home with their children, further harming their livelihoods. As a result of Israel's sweeping attack on refugee camps and cities in the northern West Bank in early 2025, approximately 12,000 children expelled from their homes spent months in displacement centers with no access to educational spaces or learning materials.

During the 2024-2025 school year, OCHA documented more than 2,000 violent attacks by soldiers or settlers on educational institutions, students and staff. The attacks included armed incursions into schools, live fire in schoolyards or inside buildings, arrests of students and staff, and harassment or arbitrary delays of young people on their way to school. During this period, more than 500 schools were forced to suspend operations at various times, disrupting the education of 84,749 students. Parents throughout the West Bank said that because of this violence, they were afraid to send their children to school alone. Between January 2024 and the end of March 2025, OCHA documented 59 incidents in which Israeli military activity disrupted the operation of UNRWA schools. At the time, UNRWA operated 96 schools in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with approximately 46,000 students as of 2023. In 28 of the documented incidents, forces used tear gas inside or near the schools, and live fire was documented in six, putting the lives of students and staff at risk. Following enactment of the anti-UNRWA laws in 2024, police entered schools run by the agency in East Jerusalem in May 2025, during the school day, and served them with closure orders. Military forces detained teachers and staff, while hundreds of frightened students remained in their classrooms until soldiers ordered teachers to send them home immediately. According to Ir Amim, approximately 1,100 students attended these schools.

On the morning of Monday, 16 September 2024, settlers entered the grounds of the school in the southern part of the al-Mu'arrajat community in Jericho District. They attacked activists who were present, using clubs, and injured one woman in the arm. Hearing the commotion, several students came out of their classrooms. One settler struck 13-year-old student Rahaf Mleihat, and she fled the school grounds. The teachers then locked the

classroom doors while the settlers pounded on the doors and windows in an attempt to break in. Meanwhile, more settlers arrived at the school, some masked and armed with clubs. They managed to break into the principal's office, where two teachers and a first-grade student were also present. They violently attacked them, ransacked the room and damaged equipment, while the student hid under a desk crying. The settlers then left the office and dragged the principal to their car. Several minutes later, soldiers and police arrived at the school together with a settler who was bleeding from the head. The forces removed the attacking settlers from the scene and then searched the school grounds for a suspect in the attack on the settler. The soldiers then took the principal out of the settlers' car, handcuffed him and put him in a military jeep. Later that day, soldiers returned to the school and confiscated the security cameras.

On Tuesday, 21 April 2026, six armed Israelis, four soldiers and two settlers, one of them in uniform, arrived near the boys' school in the western part of al-Mughayir. As they approached the school campus, several students began throwing stones at them from a distance of about 90 meters. The soldiers and settlers responded by firing live ammunition directly at the students. During the incident, the settler in uniform moved away from the rest of the group, positioned himself on a hill overlooking the school and fired at the students. At the same time, 14-year-old student Aws al-Na'san left his classroom and tried to run toward the village, but a bullet fired by the settler in uniform struck him in the head, and he fell immediately. Two other students were also injured by the gunfire. Residents who reached the area managed to evacuate the injured under fire, but Aws was pronounced dead upon arrival at a medical center in a neighboring village. When the students' parents heard what was happening, they sent distress calls to village residents. More residents arrived, among them Jihad Abu Na'im, 36. At the same time, soldiers shot a 63-year-old resident who was standing and watching the events without taking part in the clashes, injuring him in the leg. Abu Na'im climbed a nearby hill with other residents and began throwing stones at the soldiers and settlers in an effort to divert the gunfire away from the students and make their evacuation easier. A short time later, he was shot in the chest and fell. It is not known whether the shot was fired by the settlers or the soldiers at the scene. Abu Na'im was also evacuated by car to the medical center in the neighboring village, and from there by ambulance to the Palestine Medical Complex in Ramallah, where he was pronounced dead.

T.T., a resident of al-Mughayir, a paramedic and coordinator of the village's first-aid and civil-defense teams, described to B'Tselem what he saw at the school that day:

> "[On the day of the attack] I started getting messages from residents and the village's high school principal saying that armed settlers were near the school and that parents were being asked to come and pick up their kids. I immediately drove to the school. [...] On the way, I heard live gunfire. Judging by the volume, it was very close. I started helping the teachers and the principal lock the doors to prevent the students from going outside, fearing that if they did, a disaster would occur. After we locked the doors, one of the staff members told me that a group of students had managed to escape the school from the south side, where there's no metal fence. I immediately went out into the courtyard, and as I was coming down the stairs overlooking the western side of the school, I heard live gunfire again. Then I saw a boy get hit and fall to the ground near the western side of the school's wall. I started running toward the courtyard.
>
> I turned toward the boy, and just as I exited the western gate, some young men arrived carrying another injured boy and laid him down next to the school's northern wall. I immediately began to examine him and saw that he'd been injured on the right side of his hip. I spoke with him, and he was fully conscious.
>
> While the young men were laying him down, more young men arrived carrying someone else that'd been injured. When I saw that he was bleeding heavily from the head, I left the first boy – who was conscious and speaking clearly – and moved to the second [Aws al-Na'asan] [...]. The back of his head was missing. There was a hole that looked like a bullet entry wound above his right eyebrow. The boy's clothes were covered in blood, and his eyes had popped out of their sockets. His facial features were indistinct, and it was difficult to identify him. With the help of a few young men, I lifted the boy. I held the back of his head against my chest, and we carried him to Dr. Iyad al-Na'asan's car, who'd arrived at the scene. We drove immediately to the emergency clinic in the nearby village of Abu Falah.

> On the way, I sensed that the boy [Aws] was already dead. I asked the doctor about his condition, but he refused to answer and asked me to calm down. [...] We arrived at the emergency center in Abu Falah, and the doctors began examining him, but stopped when they realized he was already dead. [...] Meanwhile, three more wounded people arrived at the clinic. [...] After them came Jihad Abu Na'im, who'd been shot in the chest and was in very critical condition.
>
> I will never forget Aws's injuries. Not even his relatives were able to identify him. The only person who recognized him was his karate coach, who identified him by his shoes. The sight of the kids inside the school will also stay with me forever. I remember very well that some of them were crying bitterly when I arrived at the school. I even saw one child who wet himself while we were closing the doors to protect them. Though I've been volunteering as a first-aid responder for many years, this was the first time I had to deal with an injury like Aws's. Since that traumatic experience, I've lost my appetite and have trouble sleeping." Full testimony

Academic Institutions Since October 2023

Immediately after 7 October, most higher-education institutions in the West Bank switched to remote learning, in part because of the movement restrictions Israel imposed in the area. Since then, higher education in the West Bank has alternated between in-person and remote classes, and during some periods the decision has been made each morning based on road conditions. At the same time, Israel's violence against faculty and students has escalated, including harassment of people with a history of prominent political activity, raids on higher-education institutions, and widespread arbitrary arrests of faculty and students.

Five years after Israel occupied the territories in 1967, the military government approved the establishment of Birzeit University in the Ramallah area. From the university's inception, Israel intervened in developing its curriculum, rejected classes that could foster national consciousness, and closed the university for extended periods because of political organizing on campus. From 2002 through May 2026, the Israeli military raided

the university at least 26 times. At least seven of those raids took place after October 2023. During this period, students at the university organized assemblies and marches to express solidarity with Gaza residents and protest crimes committed by Israel. Between October 2023 and May 2026, Israel arrested 370 Birzeit University students. Most were active in student movements, while others were arrested over social media posts. As of May 2026, 120 of them were still detained. Some of those released were ordered not to return to campus, and some were told they would be arrested again if they did.

On 8 November 2023, Israeli forces raided Birzeit University, assaulted a security guard, vandalized the student bloc office, confiscated flags and broke into the dormitories. On 22 February 2024, plainclothes Israeli forces entered the campus and arrested the incumbent student council chair and another council member. On 22 September 2025, soldiers attacked campus security staff, damaged property and distributed leaflets threatening students and the university. One leaflet stated that "student block activity is terrorist activity" and could endanger students' futures.

On 6 January 2026, while students were holding an activity in support of political prisoners, a large military force raided the campus. During the raid, soldiers fired live ammunition and tear gas at students and buildings where they tried to take shelter. Forty-one students were injured. Eleven were taken to hospital, nine with gunshot injuries, and two were in serious condition.

The raid was described in testimony to B'Tselem by Q.Q., a university student who was on campus that day. Fearing harassment, she asked to remain anonymous:

> **"[A friend and I] sat down on the ground near the registration and admissions building, in an area called "Kamal Nasser," and started eating. Suddenly, I saw a military vehicle approaching from the south, coming from the direction of the Business School. The vehicle continued until it reached Kamal Nasser Square and stopped there. At first, I thought it would just circle the square and continue on its way. I didn't really understand what was happening. But then the vehicle stopped, a soldier got out, and immediately aimed his rifle at us. Everyone started scattering around the area. I still didn't understand what was happening until someone came over and started yelling at us to get away from there.**

> [...] While we were inside the building, we began to see smoke from the tear gas canisters in front of the Faculty of Sciences building. The smoke also seeped into the building where we were, and some of the students inhaled tear gas and were suffering. At that point, word spread among the students that occupation soldiers were near the Faculty of Sciences building and that clashes were taking place there between some students and the soldiers. Right then, I began to hear live gunfire inside the university and screams - probably from one of the students who'd been wounded.
>
> We remained trapped inside the building for over half-an-hour and didn't dare go out because the occupation soldiers were spread out across the campus. Throughout that entire time, some women couldn't stop crying. Finally, the professor told us that the soldiers had withdrawn from the campus and that we could leave.
>
> I was shocked by everything that had happened, but the scariest moment was at the beginning, when the soldier aimed his rifle at me. That night, I had trouble falling asleep. It never occurred to me that the occupation forces would raid the university campus in broad daylight, while so many students were there." Full testimony

Erasing and Replacing Identity Markers in Public Space: The Flag

Israel's longstanding effort to ban Palestinian national symbols from public space and promote Israeli or Jewish symbols in their place has taken many forms over recent decades. The clearest example is its treatment of the Palestinian flag. During the First Intifada, Israel effectively banned the Palestinian flag and treated it as a symbol of the PLO, which it then defined as a terrorist organization. Displaying the flag was grounds for arrest, confiscation and prosecution. After the Oslo Accords and mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, the organization's status changed, and punitive measures for displaying the flag declined accordingly.

In recent years, however, particularly since Israel's 37th government took office in 2022, the Palestinian flag has once again become a central target of Israeli enforcement and punishment. Although Israeli law does not prohibit displaying the Palestinian flag as such, the police and other law-enforcement authorities frequently remove it on the grounds that it may "disturb the public peace," arouse sympathy with a terrorist organization, or create a risk of public disorder. This has once again made the visible expression of Palestinian national identity in public space a target for surveillance, suppression and criminalization.

In May 2022, soldiers were filmed protecting a group of settlers as they removed a Palestinian flag in Huwarah. The footage shows the soldiers pointing their weapons at Palestinian residents passing by. That same month, violent attacks by right-wing activists and police on protesters marking Nakba Day by carrying Palestinian flags at universities throughout the country were widely documented. Several months later, in January 2023, National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir announced that he had instructed the police to remove every Palestinian flag displayed in public space. At the same time, a bill was promoted in the Knesset to prohibit the display of "flags of an enemy state, including the Palestinian Authority flag, at institutions funded or supported by the state." In line with the directive, the police routinely confiscate Palestinian flags and use extreme violence against people who display them. Following these developments, in 2025, the Return March held in the Lower Galilee to commemorate Nakba Day was canceled for the first time since 1998, because the police prohibited Palestinian flags at the event. In March 2026, police arrested an Israeli citizen from Harish on the grounds that she kept a Palestinian flag in her home. Alongside these official efforts, countless incidents have been documented in which settlers tore down Palestinian flags or forced Palestinian residents to remove flags from their homes.

As the attack on the Palestinian flag intensified, public space filled with Israeli flags. In April 2024, settler organizations launched the "Flag Project," placing Israeli flags throughout the West Bank. B'Tselem field researchers report that tens of thousands of Israeli flags have flooded the West Bank, flying along major roads, at the entrances to private compounds, and on the gates of Palestinian villages. Settlers have also covered the West Bank with Star of David graffiti and enormous metal Stars of David at road junctions and in the spaces between Palestinian villages and towns, as well as inside Palestinian communities themselves, sometimes even inside residents' homes. 'Abed Abu 'Awwad, 50, a father of six and resident of the Khirbet Samrah community, described in testimony

to B'Tselem in June 2025 how, in the settlers' view, the very presence of Israeli flags in Palestinian space justifies escalating violence against residents:

> **"They planted dozens of Israeli flags in front of our tents and forbid us, and even our flocks, from approaching them. If one of those flags they stuck everywhere falls down, even because of the wind or because a sheep brushed against it, they go berserk and blame us."** Full testimony

During this period, countless other uses of the Israeli flag as a tool for demonstrating Jewish supremacy were added to the "Flag Project." In recent years, images have circulated showing Palestinian detainees and prisoners photographed by soldiers, police officers and prison guards against a backdrop of Israeli flags, often while handcuffed and blindfolded. In various testimonies to B'Tselem, prisoners described how, as part of widespread abuse in detention facilities, soldiers and prison guards forced them to kiss the Israeli flag and subjected them to extreme violence if they refused. In April 2026, videos circulated on social media showing soldiers celebrating Israeli Independence Day against the backdrop of the total destruction in the Gaza Strip. The videos showed enormous Israeli flags hung on the ruins of buildings, fireworks launched from rooftops, and soldiers celebrating amid the rubble. At the same time, a similar video circulated showing the Israeli military's Battalion 21 holding a Memorial Day ceremony in the heart of Tulkarm Refugee Camp in the northern West Bank, against the backdrop of the massive destruction it had inflicted on the camp, with Israeli flags decorating the buildings that remained standing.

Attacks on Freedom of Expression and the Press

Surveillance and Arrests Over Social Media Posts

In 2025, an image circulated on Palestinian social media showing a notice posted at the entrance to a Palestinian home in the northern West Bank city of Tubas after soldiers reportedly arrested a member of the household. The Arabic notice read: "We are monitoring what you are doing on the internet,. [...] Circulating inciting content, writing inciting content or publishing inciting content online is a terrorist crime in every sense of the word and may expose you to arrest and imprisonment, as happened in this home. We warned you."

Since October 2023, Israel has intensified its routine investigations, arrests and harassment of Palestinian citizens of Israel and East Jerusalem residents over social media activity, particularly expressions of solidarity with Gaza residents or the sharing of religious content. According to Adalah data provided to the Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media (7amleh), between 7 October 2023 and 1 May 2024, 109 indictments were filed against Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem for what Israel defined as "incitement to terrorism." This exceeds the total number of incitement indictments filed against Palestinian citizens of Israel and East Jerusalem residents combined during the years 2018-2022.

East Jerusalem residents report that since October 2023, members of the security forces staffing the network of checkpoints and roadblocks in East Jerusalem have increasingly required them to hand over their phones for inspection of their conversations in messaging apps and their social media posts. In a 2024 survey by the Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, one-quarter of respondents from East Jerusalem said they had decided to delete social media and messaging apps from their phones because increased surveillance by the Israeli authorities made them fear being criminalized. Approximately 65% of respondents said they felt that using social media placed them at personal risk, and about one-third said their main concern was surveillance by the Israeli authorities.

This reality is not limited to East Jerusalem. According to a series of journalistic investigations, publications by human rights and civil society organizations over the past decade, and official Israeli reports, Israeli authorities routinely monitor and intervene in Palestinian digital space using technological tools, including artificial intelligence, to scan and collect social media content. Israel also uses tools that enable the hacking of private accounts. According to these reports, Israeli authorities use some of these tools to disseminate disinformation and propaganda online. One example of the military's use of online influence campaigns is the establishment of a military body known as the Center for Consciousness Operations. This unit was established in 2005 to conduct covert online psychological-warfare operations for the Israeli military, targeting audiences both in the Occupied Territories and internationally.

The Press

Since Military Order No. 101 took effect in August 1967, prior approval from a military commander has been required for any publication or distribution of material with "political significance" in the Occupied Territories. Since then, and with particular intensity during the First Intifada, which began in 1987, Israel has systematically shut down Palestinian media outlets and arrested journalists suspected of "encouraging the uprising." After the Oslo process and the partial transfer of powers to the Palestinian Authority, a multilayered censorship system was institutionalized under which the PA, heeding Israeli demands, began monitoring and even confiscating books by Palestinian intellectuals and arresting Palestinian journalists.

Beyond the censorship restricting their work, Palestinian journalists working in the West Bank are routinely exposed to harm by Israeli forces. In May 2022, soldiers shot Shireen Abu Akleh in the head and killed her at the entrance to Jenin Refugee Camp. Abu Akleh, 51 at the time of her death, was a Palestinian-American journalist with Al Jazeera who had gone to the scene to cover an Israeli raid on the refugee camp. As videos filmed during the incident show, Abu Akleh and another journalist at the scene, who was injured in the shoulder, were wearing blue vests marked "PRESS." That morning, then-Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was quick to claim there was a "considerable chance" that "armed Palestinians, who fired wildly," were responsible for her death. A B'Tselem investigation and a number of investigative reports by some of the world's leading media outlets found strong indications that the shot was fired by military forces positioned about 200 meters from where Abu Akleh was standing.

Since October 2023, the military has intensified its routine assaults and harassment of journalists, confiscation and destruction of professional equipment, arbitrary arrests, and denial of journalists' access to different parts of the West Bank for reporting and documentation. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), between October 2023 and February 2026 Israel arrested at least 60 journalists from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including about ten who were arrested after covering worshippers arriving at al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan in 2025. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), restrictions imposed by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority on journalists' movement in the West Bank have also intensified since October 2023, with access denied to major sites of Israeli violence such as the refugee camps in the northern West Bank. During roughly

the first month of Operation Iron Wall in 2025, the organization documented at least 20 deliberate attacks on media workers in areas where the operation was underway.

In 2019, Border Police officers shot photojournalist Mu'az al-'Amarneh, a resident of a-Duheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem District, in the face and blinded him in one eye while he was covering a demonstration in the village of Surif near Hebron. Four years later, several days after 7 October, he was arrested in a violent military raid on his home. In testimony to B'Tselem, al-'Amarneh, 36, a father of three, described his arrest and interrogation:

> "On 16 October 2023, at 3:30 A.M., a military force stormed my home in the a-Salam neighborhood of the camp. I told the soldiers that the door was open and unlocked, but they ordered me to be quiet, blew the door up, and stormed inside.
>
> There were about 20 soldiers. I told the officer that my kids were sleeping and that I would do whatever they asked. I held my ID and raised my hands. I handed him my ID and asked him what he wanted. "I want Mu'az," he said, and told there was an order to arrest me.
>
> They ordered me to bring my wife and children into the living room, and then he took me to the bathroom, where I spoke on the soldier's cellphone with an officer from the Shin Bet. The officer started making threats. When I asked him what he wanted, he said I was inciting against the state and that they would teach me a lesson. I told him I was sick and that I'd already lost an eye because of them. Immediately after that brief conversation, the soldiers cuffed my hands behind my back with zip ties – without blindfolding me – and the soldiers led me down the street to the military jeeps, about 700 meters [approx. 0.4 miles]. [...] Two days after my arrest, I was transferred to Ofer Prison, west of Ramallah. They took me to the police station, where I was interrogated by someone in civilian clothes, who asked me about Facebook posts and my work as a journalist. Most of the interrogation took the form of threats. For example, he said that children are being murdered in Gaza, and that they would kill our children too." Full testimony

Journalist Sami a-Sa'i was arrested in February 2024 during a military raid on his home on the grounds that he posed a "threat to national security." The allegations against him were not disclosed, and he was denied access to the material in his case. In testimony to B'Tselem, a-Sa'i, 46, a father of six from Tulkarm, described the abuse he endured during 16 months of administrative detention:

> **"The police officer who interrogated me introduced himself as Khaled and accused me of belonging to Hamas and aiding a Palestinian armed group. I denied both accusations. [...] At the infirmary, a doctor received me and asked me, "Are you Hamas?" I replied that I was a journalist. The doctor said they would "rape everyone who belongs to Hamas," and in Arabic said things like, "We'll fuck them." Then he examined me. After that, the Border Police officers led me back to the passageway. [...] After I stripped naked, they led me a few meters, and then one of them ordered me to get down on my knees with my head on the floor. The IPS men started kicking me, punching me, beating me with a hand-held metal detector, and kicking me all over my body. The abuse lasted a long time, and while it was going on, I heard them warning one another about the security cameras on the walls. [...] I was so exhausted that I threw myself face down on the floor, and they started beating me again. One of them sat on my back, another trod on my head, and the third tried to push something hard into my anus. [...] About 40 days after I was released, after giving it a lot of thought, I decided to share on social media what they did to me. I spoke about the abuse I went through in custody and about how the IPS people treated me. I didn't shy away from talking about the rape, even though Israeli violations of that kind are considered taboo in our society, and people don't talk about them." Full testimony**

As journalists faced increasing violence, the Israeli government advanced a series of laws designed to ban media outlets in an effort to silence criticism, particularly by Palestinians, throughout the territory under its control. As part of this effort, in September 2024, the Israeli military raided the Ramallah offices of Al Jazeera, one of the leading news organizations in the Arab world, confiscated press equipment and issued a closure order for the premises.

Arrest and Incarceration

Since occupying the territories in 1967, Israel has arrested more than 800,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Approximately 600,000 of them were imprisoned for extended periods, including many community and political leaders. Many were imprisoned repeatedly throughout their lives. Israel's various arms routinely persecute political prisoners after their release through repeated raids on their homes, frequent summonses for interrogation, harassment of family members, and threats in response to any participation in political or community activity.

Over the years, B'Tselem has collected countless testimonies of the torture endured by Palestinian detainees and prisoners in Israeli incarceration facilities. Israel has used these practices not only as punishment but also as a broad deterrence mechanism intended to make clear to Palestinian residents that any participation in political or civil activity may lead to imprisonment without trial, often accompanied by severe violence.

Since October 2023, Israel has expanded its use of the incarceration system as a means of repression and intimidation directed at both individuals and the Palestinian collective as a whole. More than 7,000 Palestinian residents were arrested in the mass arrest campaign Israel carried out in the West Bank between October 2023 and March 2024. They included public officials and lawmakers from Palestinian political parties, human rights defenders, academic staff, students and journalists. In July 2024, about half of the Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli incarceration facilities were being held in administrative detention, without trial or the ability to defend themselves against the allegations. Together with detainees from Gaza and Palestinian citizens of Israel, West Bank detainees and prisoners have experienced, and continue to experience, ongoing abuse in Israeli detention and incarceration facilities, which immediately after 7 October were transformed into a network of torture camps. As of June 2026, 32 detainees and prisoners from the West Bank had died in Israeli prisons and detention facilities, along with 52 residents of the Gaza Strip and six Palestinian citizens of Israel (for more, see the chapter "Violence and Intimidation").

The Role of the Palestinian Authority

After Israel's attack on Palestinian leadership following its occupation of Palestinian territory in 1948 and the partial exile of that leadership to Jordan, international political representation of Palestinians shifted to a large extent outside Palestine, primarily to Arab countries and the international arena. With the establishment of the PLO in 1964, and the international community's recognition of it as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people a decade later (UN Resolution 3236), independent Palestinian political representation began to take shape internationally.

Under the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, Israel granted the Palestinian Authority, which was composed largely of PLO members, partial control over the administration of daily life in limited areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, ostensibly as a foundation for a future independent Palestinian state. In practice, Israel retained most powers in key areas, including control over residents' movement throughout the territory and all aspects of security activity, and dictated the limits of the PA's authority. In other areas, the PA was assigned broad civil responsibility as the principal provider of public services to Palestinian residents.

Since the agreements were signed, and with greater intensity since the Second Intifada, Israel has prevented the Palestinian Authority from protecting the residents it is supposed to represent, even in areas ostensibly under its full authority. The escalation of Israeli violence against Palestinians has also been accompanied by a direct and sustained Israeli attack on PA institutions themselves. Over the years, Israel has arrested dozens of Palestinian lawmakers and held them in administrative detention, paralyzing PA institutions for extended periods. At the same time, Israel imposed draconian economic restrictions on the PA, creating growing difficulties in funding its budget, public services for West Bank residents, and public-sector salaries (for more, see the chapter "Economic Strangulation").

The fact that PA employees are allowed to hold official titles, issue diplomatic statements, enjoy various benefits and conduct high-profile international visits serves Israel by reinforcing the illusion that the Palestinian Authority possesses political power or genuine sovereignty. In reality, Israel subordinates the PA to its needs and severely restricts its room for action. Measures taken by the Israeli government since

October 2023 have driven the PA into unprecedented economic collapse, and efforts to eliminate the PA have become more explicit than ever. Minister Smotrich, for example, declared that his intention was "to bring down the evil and terror authority known as the Palestinian Authority."

Amid Israel's genocidal attack on the Gaza Strip and escalating Israeli violence in the West Bank, public support for the Palestinian Authority and its head, Mahmoud Abbas, is exceedingly low. Neither is perceived as capable of or fit to represent and protect the Palestinian public.

E. ETHNIC CLEANSING AND TERRITORIAL TAKEOVER: DISPOSSESSION, LAND GRAB AND EXPULSION

Introduction

Since occupying the West Bank in June 1967, Israel has seized upwards of two million dunams [1 dunam = 0.1 hectares], more than one-third of the West Bank's total area, dispossessing Palestinians of their land. Israel's mechanism of spatial destruction and takeover in the West Bank is closing ever-growing areas to Palestinians and reshaping the territory as a contiguous space for Israeli settlers. This system combines official bureaucratic measures, such as military orders and declarations of land as "firing zones," "closed military zones," "nature reserves," and "state land," with "civilian" takeover efforts led by settler militias that use frequent, severe violence to intimidate Palestinian residents. Together, these measures implement an Israeli policy centered on ethnic cleansing in the West Bank: uprooting Palestinian communities from their homes through violence, destruction, and dispossession, and establishing Israeli control over the areas emptied of their residents.

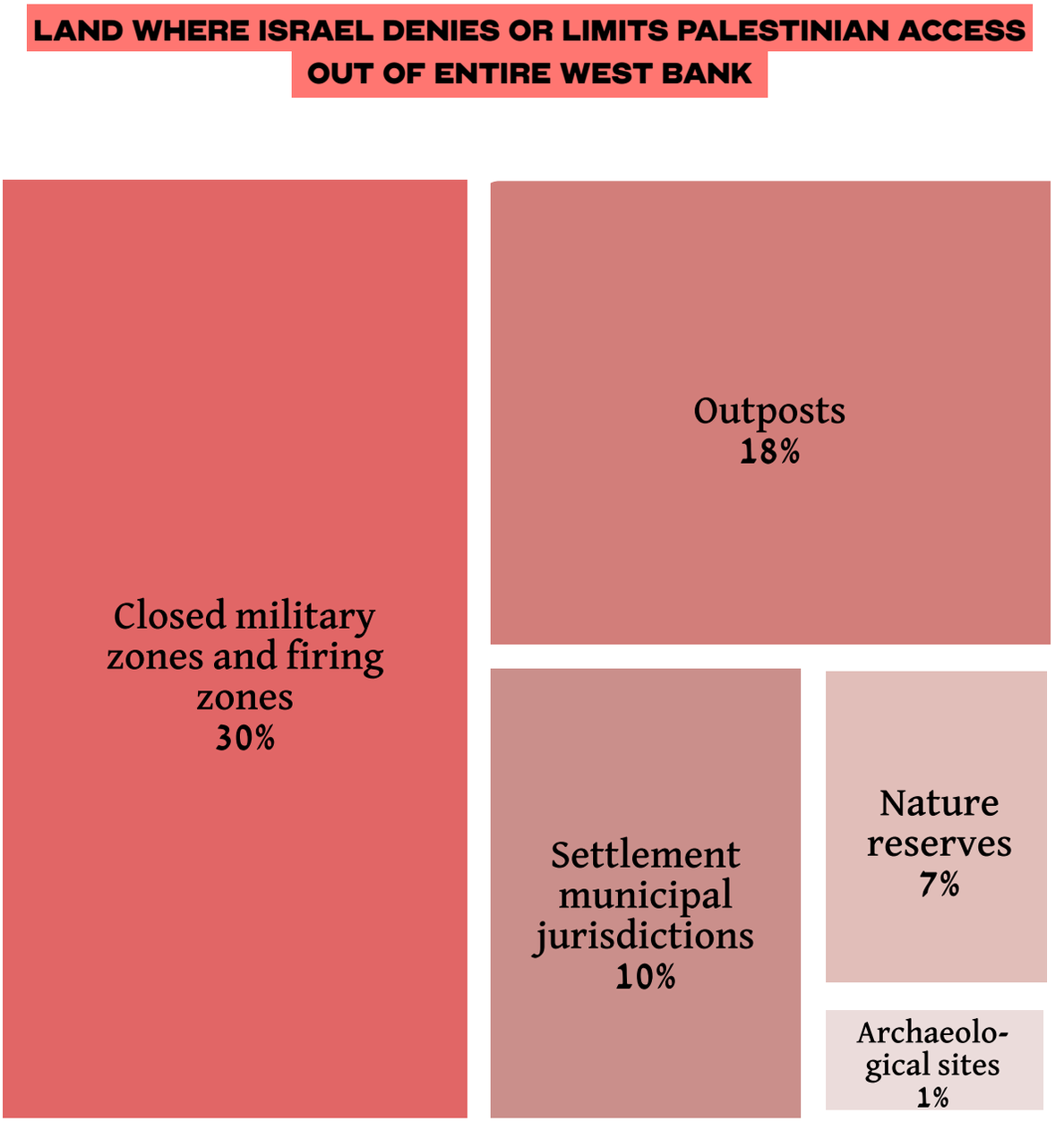
Israel has established some 500 settlements and outposts in the territories it occupied, including 146 settlements it officially recognizes. The number is even higher if East Jerusalem is included. Since the 1970s, the state has established about 12 neighborhoods for Jewish Israelis in Jerusalem, including Gilo, Pisgat Ze'ev, and Ramot, to ensure a Jewish majority in the city and establish territorial contiguity. It has also facilitated settler compounds in the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods, such as "Shimon HaTzadik" inside Sheikh Jarrah and settler compounds in the Silwan area.

The settlements and their assigned jurisdictions control about 540,000 dunams, roughly 10% of the total area of the West Bank, that have been declared off-limits to Palestinians. As of the end of 2024, 737,332 settlers lived in these areas.

In addition to officially recognized settlements, B'Tselem data show that 405 outposts have been established throughout the West Bank over the years. While Israel nominally considers these outposts illegal, it nevertheless provides de facto support for their establishment. According to Kerem Navot, 239 are "farm outposts," a key driver of the accelerated takeover of Palestinian space in recent years.

Since occupying the West Bank, Israel has consistently striven to expand Israeli presence and control over the territory, using various methods of control, expulsion, and dispossession and steadily shrinking the space where individual and collective Palestinian life can exist. The formation of the far-right government in December 2022, and the steep escalation in Israeli violence since October 2023, dramatically escalated ethnic cleansing in the West Bank. Today, spatial destruction and takeover are carried out through a combined assault on every element of Palestinian life, aimed at accelerating the dispossession of Palestinian land, confining Palestinian residents to densely populated, disconnected urban enclaves, and enabling Israeli takeover of large areas of the West Bank.

The escalation of Israeli policy plays out on two tracks: One is the calculated takeover of bureaucratic, economic, and legal mechanisms that enable extensive land grabs from the Palestinian population. The other is the sanctioning of routine, extreme violence by settler militias based in outposts that dominate vast areas of the West Bank. This violence makes life unbearable for Palestinians, drives them from their homes, and dispossesses them of their land, which in turn paves the way for Jewish takeover. As of July 2026, Israel, through settler militias, had taken over more than 1,070,000 dunams, 18% of the West Bank. In addition, according to a report by Peace Now and Kerem Navot, between 2023 and 2025, 185 new outposts were established in the West Bank, about 130 of them farm outposts. B'Tselem data show that as of June 2026, this takeover had led to the expulsion of 64 Palestinian communities and shepherding hamlets from their homes, and the partial expulsion of another 18 communities. The organizing logic behind these two tracks, coupled with the legal system that enables and supports them, lays bare that this is an integrated system employing the full range of tactics to take over the territory and dispossess its Palestinian residents. While actively pursuing Palestinian expulsion, Israel is also advancing a series of institutional measures designed to tighten its territorial grip on the West Bank and make it easier for Israeli bodies to take over more land.



*These figures do not include approximately 33,000 people displaced from the Jenin, Nur Shams, and Tulkarm refugee camps

Sources: Peace Now and Kerem Navot, B'Tselem

How Israel Takes Over Land in the West Bank

Declaring Land as "State Land"

In 1979, the High Court of Justice ruled, in what became known as the Elon Moreh ruling, that the state could not rely on security pretexts to seize privately owned Palestinian land for the establishment of civilian settlements. Until then, the state had made extensive use of this practice in the West Bank, seizing about 31,000 dunams of Palestinian land for Israeli settlement. After the ruling, in order to circumvent the legal obstacle and continue expanding Jewish settlement on Palestinian land, Israel began declaring Palestinian land "state land," meaning public land whose use is administered by Israel.

When Israel occupied the West Bank, 527,000 dunams, about 9% of the West Bank excluding East Jerusalem, were classified as "state land," having been registered during the British Mandate and Jordanian rule. No longer able to seize land on security pretexts after the Elon Moreh ruling, the Israeli regime shifted to extensive use of "state-land" declarations to take more Palestinian land, a method that became a central tool for Palestinian dispossession and Israeli settlement expansion. Based on a new and expansive interpretation of existing laws, these declarations created a mechanism that enabled Israel to take over privately or collectively owned Palestinian land. Most land declared state land was subsequently allocated for the establishment and expansion of settlements for Israelis in the West Bank.

From 1979 to 2002, more than 900,000 dunams in the West Bank were declared "state land," and nearly all of it was allocated for settlement use. By 2019, "state land" covered about 1,200,000 dunams in Area C, approximately 22% of the West Bank. Another roughly 200,000 dunams of state land are located in Areas A and B. Since then, about 27,000 additional dunams have been expropriated and declared "state land".

"Closed Military Zones" and Firing Zones

Between August 1967 and May 1975, Israel declared 1.5 million dunams, more than one-quarter of the West Bank (26.6%), a closed military zone, barring Palestinians from entering without a permit. Claiming the military needs these areas for various purposes, Israel denies Palestinians access to vast parts of the West Bank for any purpose. Since 1997,

Israel has also declared all settlement jurisdiction areas, about 540,000 dunams or almost one-tenth of the West Bank, closed military zones. Israel has continued to issue orders declaring various areas of the West Bank "closed military zones," and as of 2019, about 1,765,000 dunams, nearly one-third of the West Bank, had been so designated.

A particularly clear example of how the Israeli regime uses this practice to dispossess Palestinians of their land is its declaration of the Masafer Yatta area, covering about 30,000 dunams, as "Firing Zone 918" in the early 1980s. The area is home to about 12 Palestinian communities that have lived there for generations, long before it was designated a firing zone. In 1999, residents of these communities were evicted for the first time on the claim that they were living illegally inside a firing zone.

An internal Central Command document from June 2025 states: "In recent months, the Central Command has been using the full range of civilian and security tools at its disposal to fulfill its duty: preserving the firing zone for IDF training." Since 2022, settlers have established 11 outposts inside Firing Zone 918, which serve as launching pads for systematic violent attacks on local Palestinian communities. Though "closed military zones" and "firing zones" are theoretically off-limits to anyone who does not have a special permit, including Israelis, the Central Command document names only Palestinian villages, not the outposts, as interfering with the "duty to preserve the firing zone for IDF training."

This practice is not limited to Masafer Yatta. As of 2024, about 41% of the land taken over by settlers in the West Bank had been declared firing zones closed to civilians, demonstrating that, declaring land as a firing zone is often another means the Israeli regime uses to take over Palestinian space.

Declaring Nature Reserves

In January 2020, then-Defense Minister Naftali Bennett approved the Civil Administration's declaration on seven new nature reserves covering 130,000 dunams. Estimates indicate that 15% of the land in these reserves is privately owned by Palestinians. The largest was the Nahal Og Nature Reserve near Jericho, which covers about 22,000 dunams, including about 6,000 dunams of privately owned Palestinian land; the rest is "state land." In

total, between 1969 and 2022, Israel declared about 48 nature reserves in the West Bank, covering at least 383,600 dunams, about 7% of the West Bank.

Declaring Palestinian land a "nature reserve" severely restricts residents' movement and access and their ability to develop and build in the area, engage in agriculture, or hold on to land reserves for future expansion, farming, and grazing. For example, the Nahal Prat National Park includes land belonging to Palestinian residents of 'Anata, Hizma, and Jaba'. Its designation as a "nature reserve" prevents them from accessing and cultivating their land.

Historical Research and Archaeological Preservation

Alongside legal, planning, and military tools, Israel also uses archaeological excavations and the designation of heritage sites as a means of taking over land, dispossessing Palestinians, and deepening its control of the West Bank. Over the years, hundreds of archaeological sites and parks have been declared throughout the West Bank, mainly in Area C. In many cases, these designations prevent Palestinian residents from expanding their communities, cultivating their land, or developing infrastructure, while cutting them off from tourism-based sources of income. Since the Oslo Accords were signed, the Civil Administration's Archaeology Staff Officer has been responsible for all archaeological activity in Area C. The officer has authority over the full range of archaeological activity there, including where excavations are carried out, how they are managed, who is allowed to carry out the excavations and for what purpose. The authority granted to the Civil Administration's Archaeology Unit allow it to shape the historical narrative surrounding archaeological discoveries, elevate the historical, cultural, and religious ties of the State of Israel and the Jewish people to the West Bank, and, in the process, erase Palestinians' historical and religious connection to the same land.

Some archaeological sites in Area C have been incorporated into settlement jurisdiction areas and declared closed to Palestinians. In other cases, settlement jurisdictions were expanded specifically to include archaeological sites. In this way, beyond controlling the historical narrative, archaeological sites also serve as another physical tool for taking over space and pushing Palestinians out of it. Closing archaeological sites to Palestinians restricts their freedom of movement, dispossesses them of their land, and dissolves the intimate familiarity that binds their communities to the landscape in which they have lived for generations.

In other cases, the presence of archaeological sites is used to justify incursions into and takeover of Palestinian land. In 2010, the al-Qaws spring was declared an archaeological site. The spring had been the main water source for the villages of Deir Nizam and a-Nabi Saleh. Following the declaration, Palestinian residents, including people who owned private agricultural land near the spring, were barred from accessing it. Residents of a-Nabi Saleh held weekly demonstrations to protest the settler takeover of the spring and their land. The demonstrations, which continued until 2017, systematically suppressed with violence by the military; hundreds of people were injured, and three were killed. Another person was killed at a demonstration against the genocide in Gaza on 17 October 2023. Eight additional Palestinians were killed in various circumstances, including military invasions into the village.

Expropriations of this kind continue to expand. In 2025, the Civil Administration announced that it would expropriate 1,800 dunams of privately owned Palestinian land, containing thousands of olive trees, for development of the archaeological site at Sabastiya. This is the largest expropriation order for antiquities development since Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967. Residents of the Palestinian town stress that they have long regarded the site as an integral part of their lives, protected it, and earned income from tourism and agriculture around it. Nevertheless, Israel's growing takeover of the site's management has included restrictions on access to agricultural land, destroyed the local tourism sector, and excluded residents from managing the site and benefiting economically from it.

In February 2026, the Security Cabinet decided that Civil Administration enforcement bodies would begin operating in Areas A and B as well, including in the field of heritage-site and archaeological preservation. The decision lends itself to broad interpretation because the West Bank is rich in antiquities. In practice, additional enforcement powers broaden Israel's takeover of Palestinian living space in the West Bank, including by advancing home demolitions or taking over archaeological sites in Areas A and B under the pretext of "protecting" them. Adding to this, in May 2026, a bill to establish a new Antiquities Authority in the West Bank, subordinate to the Minister of Heritage, passed its first reading. If the law is passed, the new antiquities authority would subsume powers currently held by the Archaeology Staff Officer, including the authority to conduct excavations, declare archaeological sites, and expropriate land. Archaeological sites could then be used to establish Israeli civilian control in the West Bank. These measures are another facet of the process of annexing the West Bank to Israel.

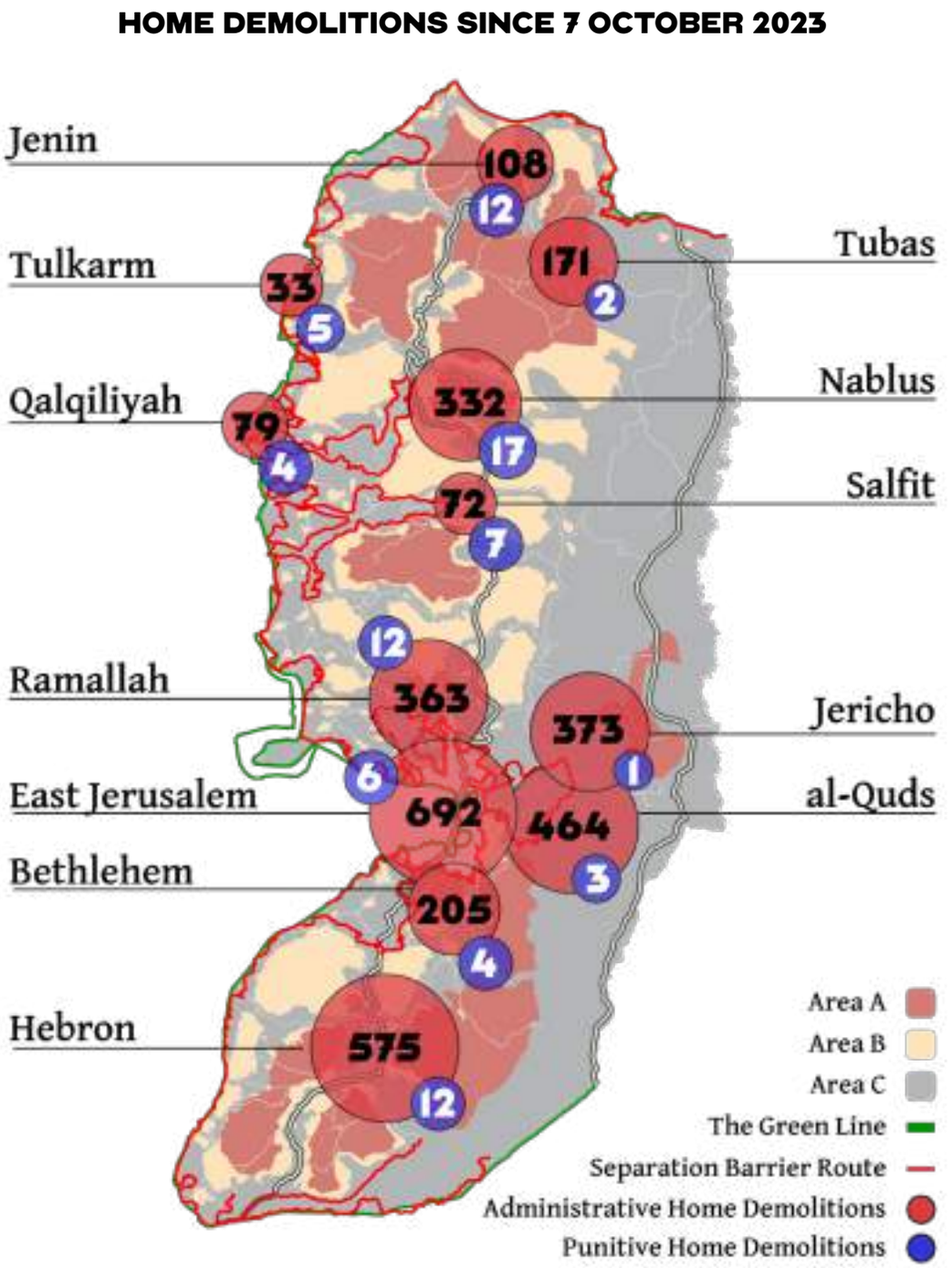
Planning Policy and Home Demolitions

Israeli planning policy is another tool used to prevent Palestinian development and dispossess Palestinians of their land, particularly in Area C and in East Jerusalem. Israeli officials routinely use legal and planning language when addressing the issue. Expressions such as "planning and building laws," "planning procedures," and "illegal construction" are also used in relation to construction in settlements and inside Israel's borders. Yet, in stark contrast to Jewish-Israeli communities, where planning and building laws regulate development and balance competing needs, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israel wields them for the opposite purpose: to prevent development, block future planning, and carry out demolition orders.

As part of Israel's policy of non-planning in these areas, the state places major obstacles in the way of obtaining building permits for private homes, agricultural structures, infrastructure, and public buildings. According to Civil Administration data, between January 2000 and mid-2016, Palestinian residents submitted 5,475 building permit applications to the planning authorities. Only 226, about 4%, were approved. Many residents do not apply in the first place because they see no point in doing so. With virtually no possibility of obtaining a permit and building legally, and given the changing needs of Palestinian residents, they are forced to expand their communities and build their homes without permits, which means living under the constant threat that their homes and businesses will be demolished.

Israel's demolitions of structures in the West Bank and East Jerusalem fall into three categories: demolitions on the pretext of construction without a permit, which account for most demolitions Israel has carried out over the years; demolitions as a punitive measure; and demolitions on the pretext of military needs.

According to B'Tselem data, from 7 October 2023 through the end of June 2026, Israel demolished 2,775 structures in the West Bank and 692 in East Jerusalem on the pretext of construction without a permit. These figures include non-residential structures such as fences, water cisterns, storage facilities, agricultural structures, businesses, public buildings, and others. Of all the structures demolished, 1,198 were homes. Some owners were forced to demolish their own homes after receiving demolition orders from the authorities. A total of 4,258 people lost their homes, including 2,083 minors.



*Not Including Refugee Camp Demolitions
*Demolitions from October 2023 to 30 June 2026

Source: B'Tselem

In 2024, the number of structures Israel demolished in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) reached a two-decade high: 869 structures were demolished on the pretext of construction without a permit. The pace rose further in 2025, when 1,195 structures were demolished on the same pretext. As of June 2026, given the current pace of demolitions, the 2026 figures are expected to show a continued increase.

Silwan, home to about 20,000 Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, is an example of Israel's accelerated use of home demolitions to Judaize space since October 2023. Silwan's location next to the Old City, al-Aqsa Mosque for Palestinians and the Temple Mount for Jews, places it at the forefront of the Israeli regime's efforts to expel and dispossess Palestinians in Jerusalem.

In 2010, the Jerusalem Municipality announced plans to build a tourism park, "King's Garden," on the land of Silwan's al-Bustan neighborhood, as an extension of the Jerusalem Walls National Park and the City of David archaeological site. The City of David site has been operated since the late 1990s by the settler organization Elad, which openly works to Judaize Silwan. Between 7 October 2023 and the end of June 2026, Israel demolished 123 structures, among them 87 homes, in Silwan pursuant to demolition orders issued by the Jerusalem Municipality. A total of 352 people lost their homes, including 155 minors. Thirteen of the homes were demolished in March and April 2026, displacing 53 residents, including 23 children. On 14 June 2026, the Supreme Court ordered the eviction of 12 more families from Silwan, all members of the extended Sarhan family. According to Peace Now, the eviction orders issued against the family are part of a broader effort to expel about 700 residents from the neighborhood and move in Jewish-Israeli settlers to replace them.

2022 Onward: Accelerating Ethnic Cleansing and Territorial Takeover

The Settlement Administration

When Netanyahu's sixth government was formed in 2022, the coalition agreements between its parties provided for the establishment of the "Settlement Administration." The Settlement Administration is an agency within the Ministry of Defense set up for the express purpose of taking over a wide range of functions previously performed by the

military, through a unit tasked with managing civilian affairs in the West Bank, the Civil Administration, established in 1981. The transfer of powers from the Civil Administration to the new Settlement Administration was completed between February 2023 and May 2024. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich was given ministerial responsibility for the new administration's work, and his associate Yehuda Eliyahu was appointed to head it. The powers transferred to the new administration touch almost every aspect of Palestinian life in the West Bank: land management; planning and construction; oversight and enforcement against construction without permits; supervision of Israeli local authorities in the West Bank; professional licensing; trade and the economy; management of nature reserves and antiquities sites; and more. In an interview with Haaretz, Yoni Danino, who served as the administration's chief of staff, said its two main goals were to have the state treat the West Bank as it treats the Negev and Galilee in terms of development and resource allocation, and to bring about the "application of sovereignty in Judea and Samaria." Since its establishment, the administration has worked fervently to legalize outposts, expropriate land, and selectively enforce planning and building laws against Palestinian construction in Area C. In a break from past practice, the administration does not require approval from the political leadership to advance most settlement construction plans.

The Settlement Division

Israel's practice of removing areas of responsibility from the military government and transferring them to Israeli civilian bodies began long before the establishment of the Settlement Administration, dating back to the late 1960s. A critical institution in this pursuit has been the Settlement Division, formally part of the World Zionist Organization but its activities are funded by the Israeli government. As of 2024, the division's budget stood at more than ILS 1 billion.

Among other things, the Settlement Division is responsible for managing land that the Israeli government allocated to it and expropriated from the Palestinian population in the West Bank. It was given control of a significant share of the West Bank's "state land," and its management of the areas under its authority is geared toward Judaizing the territory, including by supporting the establishment of settlements and outposts.

Since the far-right government was formed in December 2022, the Settlement Division has become one of the institutional mechanisms facilitating the expulsion of Palestinians and their dispossession from their land. At the end of 2025, more than ILS 500 million from the state budget was transferred to the division to finance the establishment of outposts, under the rubric of "support for young settlement," and the distribution of "security infrastructure and components," including military equipment purchased for settlers. This budget also funds equipment used by settler militias to intimidate Palestinian residents with the aim of driving them out of their communities and off their land.

A prominent example is Ranger off-road vehicles, which are funded by the Settlement Administration and the Settlement Division. Numerous videos documenting attacks on Palestinian communities and residents show settlers using these "security components" to systematically assault Palestinians in the West Bank and their flocks. Although each Ranger, estimated to cost ILS 100,000, is purchased from the state budget, the Israeli government did not respond to inquiries from Israeli journalists about the exact cost of the vehicles and the criteria for their distribution. In January 2026, an additional ILS 325 million was approved for 2026-2027 for "security components in communities." This equipment is expected to continue serving settlers to intimidate and assault Palestinians and drive them off their land.

Repeal of the Disengagement Law

In December 2025, Israel completed the retroactive approval of 19 outposts in the West Bank. Several had been built as "Area C enclaves" deep inside Areas A and B, including in the northern West Bank on land evacuated under the 2005 Disengagement Plan. Referring to the retroactive approval of the outposts, Minister Smotrich said:

> **"These are highly strategic areas for settlement, with the main point being the reestablishment of the settlements of Ganim and Kadim in northern Samaria. This is righting a historic injustice of expulsion from 20 years ago. We are putting the brakes on the rise of a Palestinian terror state."**

The outposts were retroactively approved as part of the move to repeal several sections of the Disengagement Law, allowing Israelis to enter the former settlements of Gannim,

Kadim, and Sa-Nur. Even before the law was repealed, an outpost was established at Homesh, another settlement evacuated under the Disengagement Plan, with the backing of the military and the Israeli regime. At the same time, Palestinian residents of the nearby village of Burqah suffered severe settler violence that prevented them from accessing their private land in the area of the evacuated settlement. In April 2026, the Sa-Nur settlement was reestablished even before Israel completed its regularization. A month later, in May 2026, settlers from the area forced Palestinian residents to remove a body from a fresh grave, claiming it had been buried "too close" to the Sa-Nur settlement.

In May 2026, Minister Smotrich announced that he had placed before the Israeli Cabinet a detailed plan to transfer "strategic areas" classified as Areas A and B to Area C, which is under full Israeli control. According to people close to Smotrich, the move was intended to effectively nullify the Oslo Accords. It follows a bill "to repeal the Oslo Accord, the Hebron Agreement, and the Wye Agreement," submitted in March 2025 by Knesset Member Limor Son Har-Melech of the Otzma Yehudit party.

Advancing Land Registration

To accelerate the takeover even further, in February 2026 the state allocated ILS 244 million to establish a mechanism for formalizing land registration in Area C, with the goal of registering 15% of the land there in the land registry as state-owned within five years. This would be the first time Israel has advanced a land-registration process through a government body since occupying the West Bank.

Theoretically, the land-registration process would allow Palestinians to claim ownership of land belonging to them, but this is an illusion. In practice, Palestinians making ownership claims would have to prove their title to the Israeli authorities. Yet without access to information and documents establishing their rights, and because Palestinian property records are not accepted by Israeli bureaucratic mechanisms, completing the process would be nearly impossible. The same is true for hundreds of thousands of Palestinian "absentees," meaning Palestinian refugees expelled during the Nakba in 1948 or the Naksa in 1967. They would be unable to participate in the registration process even though, combined, they own large tracts of land. The process is therefore expected to lead to broad-scale "legal" dispossession of Palestinians from their land. Ownership will

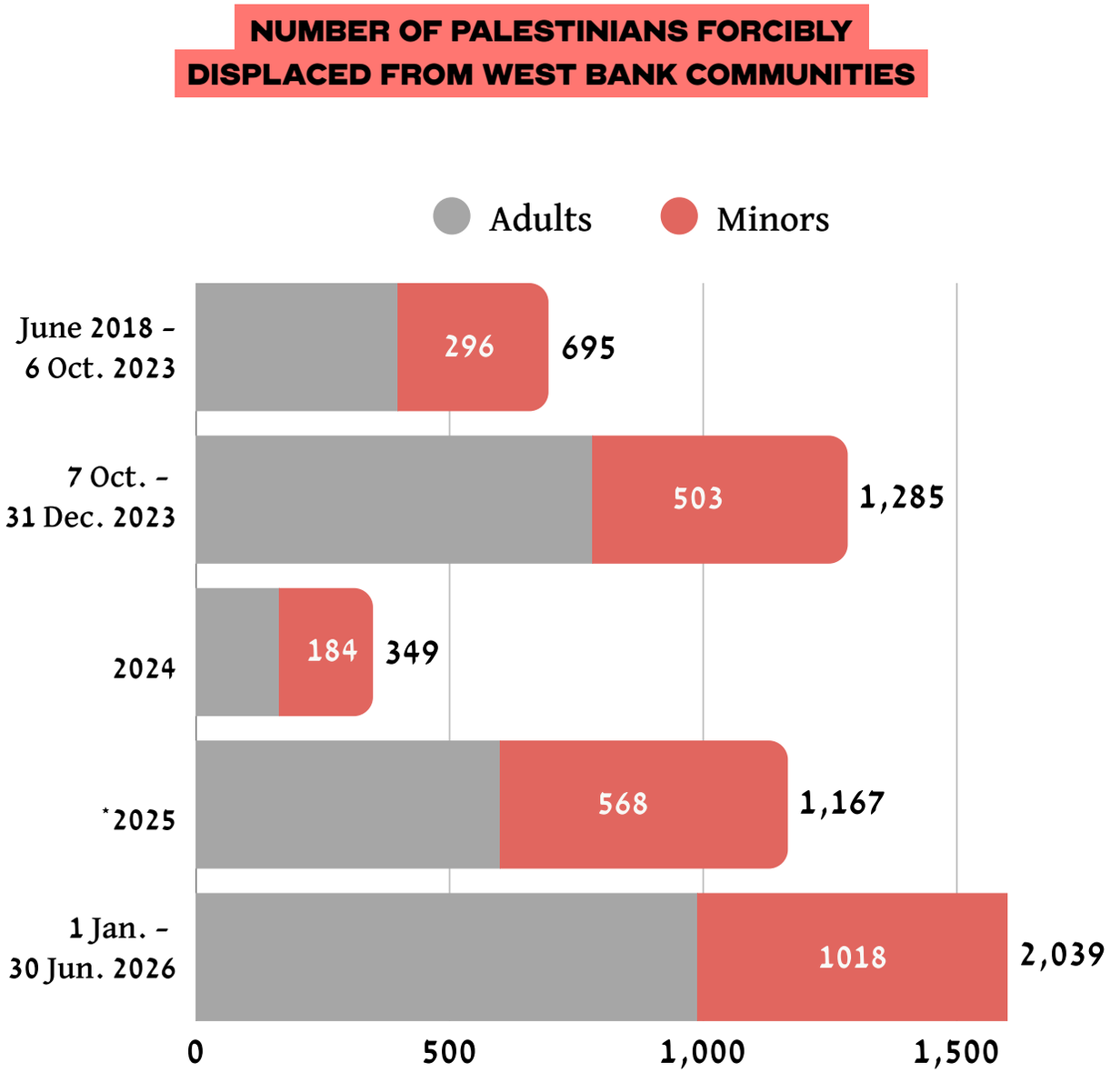
be registered conclusively in the land registry, and Palestinians who are dispossessed will be unable to claim title in the future.

Earlier in February of 2026, the Security Cabinet approved a series of complementary measures enabling the takeover of extensive areas of the West Bank. The Jordanian law that applies in the West Bank, which prohibits the sale of West Bank real estate to anyone who is not Jordanian or Palestinian of Arab origin was repealed. Jewish Israelis will be able to purchase land directly from Palestinians in the West Bank, just as they do inside the Green Line. The confidentiality of West Bank land registers was also lifted. This will make it easier to identify Palestinian owners of land and buildings and enable actors involved in settlement expansion to pressure them to sell their property.

Expulsion of Communities

In July 2022, the Bedouin pastoral community of Ras a-Tin, which had lived for decades on land belonging to Kafr Malik and al-Mughayir, was violently expelled by settlers. It was the first time an entire Palestinian community had been driven from its home as a result of settler violence rather than by the military. Several years earlier, a violent outpost known as "Micha's Farm," one of a network of outposts established in the area, had been set up about one kilometer from the community. Since the establishment of the farm, residents of the community have suffered from a series of incidents, including settlers' raids on the homes of residents of the community, in a series of brutal attacks that ultimately forced the community to flee.

What was unprecedented at the time has since become routine. According to B'Tselem monitoring, as of June 2026, 64 Palestinian communities with a combined population of 4,328 people had been violently expelled from their homes in Area C and also in Areas A and B. Another 512 residents were displaced from 18 partially expelled communities. Thousands of Palestinians in dozens of additional communities face a real threat of expulsion as a result of daily settler attacks.



*These figures do not include approximately 33,000 people displaced from the Jenin, Nur Shams, and Tulkarm refugee camps

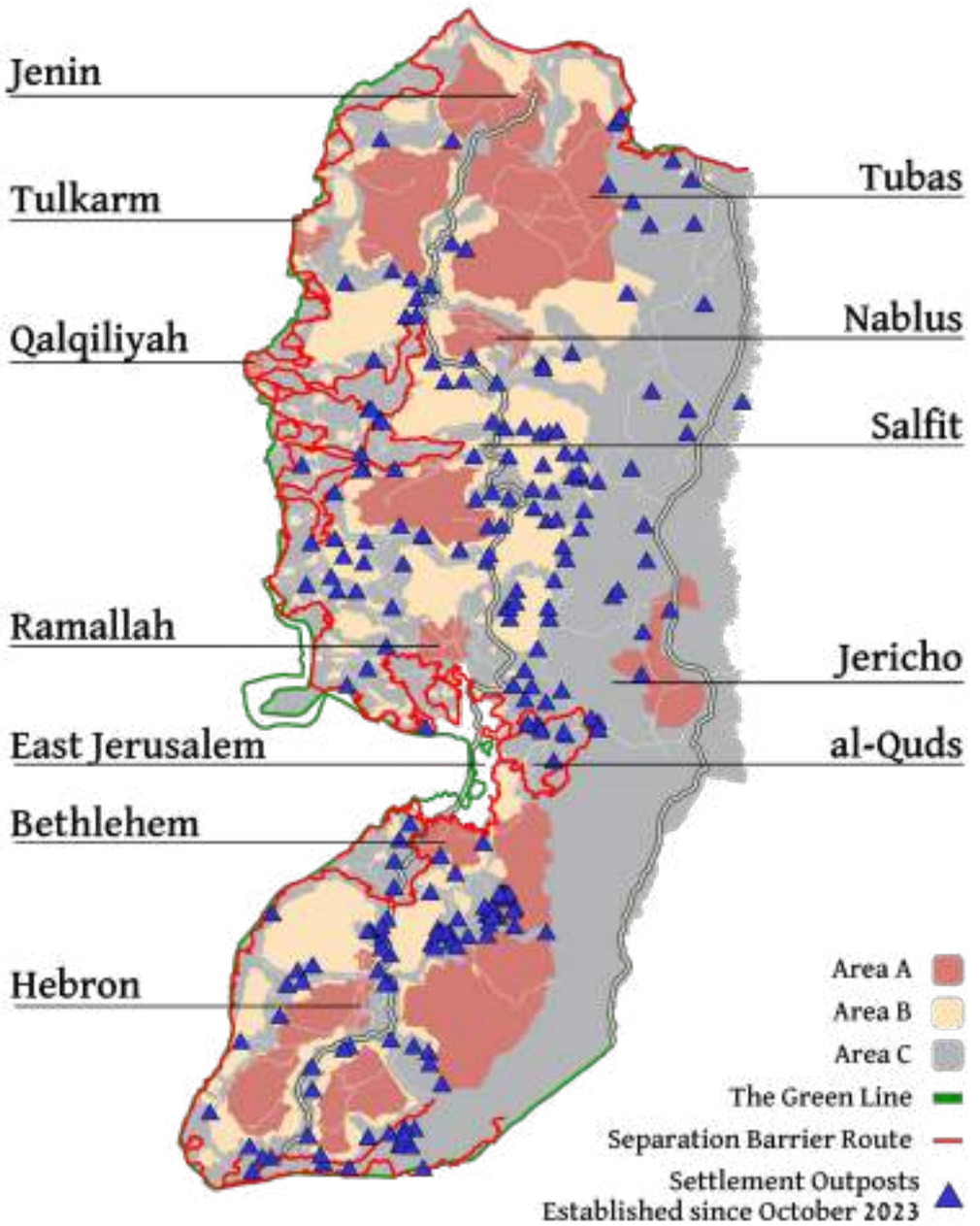
Farm Outposts

In November 1992, the Israeli government adopted Decision 360, under which Israel would not advance the establishment of new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Construction of new settlements was formally frozen, but "outposts" began appearing throughout the West Bank without an official government decision. Because they were established outside formal procedures, no land was allocated to them, and no formal boundaries were set. Their buildings and infrastructure were constructed without building permits, and they are illegal even according to Israeli authorities. Nevertheless, Israel supported the establishment of most of them. It instructed the military to protect them or funded private security, paved roads and built water and electricity infrastructure for them, subsidized economic ventures operating there, supported settlers living in them, and granted them state backing by advancing regularization proceedings, allocating budgets, and providing legal defense in petitions seeking their evacuation.

Outposts were established in several "waves." The first came in the late 1990s, after the Oslo Accords and with the first Netanyahu government. It consisted mainly of residential outposts with significant agricultural activity. Agricultural outposts based on sheep herding were also established at the time. The second wave came in 2001-2003, during the Second Intifada.

The third wave has unfolded in recent years, particularly since the right-wing government was formed in 2022. During this period, land grabs from Palestinians have risen sharply through the establishment of "farm outposts," which are generally populated by a small number of people, often members of a single family and sometimes teenagers who serve as additional labor on the farm. In many cases, the Settlement Division, in its capacity as administrator of so-called state land, gives settlers at these outposts grazing land through "grazing contracts." Under this arrangement, land is given to settlers without a tender, without payment, and even without clearly specifying the size of the area. This enables the takeover of larger areas while preserving the appearance of an ostensibly chaotic reality in which settlers act independently, when in fact, their actions are carried out in close coordination and cooperation with Israeli institutions.

SETTLEMENT OUTPOSTS ESTABLISHED SINCE 7 OCTOBER 2023



Source: Kerem Navot

A lieutenant colonel in Central Command described the ties between the state, the military, and the settlers operating on the ground in December 2025:

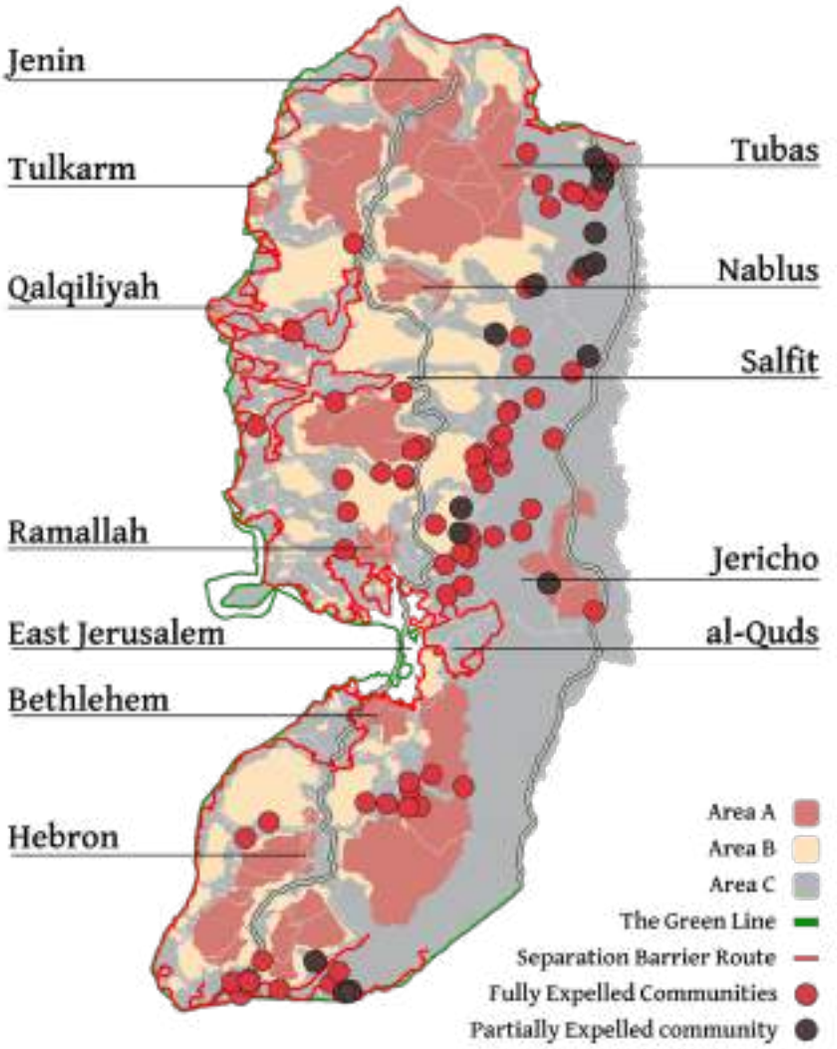
> **"An organized mechanism for establishing farms really began to take shape, in full cooperation with the command. We don't just know that farms are going to be established; we take part in coordinating their establishment in advance [...]. This isn't just coordination with a wink and a nod. The division and the regional brigade actually have an order called 'farm breaking ground': what forces are allocated to secure it, how it is established, and how many caravans it will have. It is, in fact, a fully structured process."**

In an interview with the television program Zman Emet, the officer said that when GOC Central Command Avi Bluth took office, he appointed Lt. Col. Elitzur Trabelsi as the command's regional defense officer, making him the "key person" handling the farm outposts and coordinating between the military and settlers before the outposts are established. The officer said Trabelsi is involved in preparing plans for new outposts, conducts preliminary site visits and interviews the candidate to run the farm. He also engages with the regional brigade commander and submits maps for his approval before they are submitted for final approval by Central Command head Bluth.

The Expulsion Process

Once the state allocates grazing land to settlers, outposts are established near Palestinian communities, setting the expulsion mechanism in motion. In most cases, it involves practices of violence and intimidation intended to forcibly displace Palestinian residents from their homes. First, settlers graze sheep and cattle near Palestinian communities, take over the communities' grazing areas, drive Palestinian shepherds away, appropriate water sources, and more. If these measures fail to drive the community out, settlers turn to more direct violence: they harass residents, invade their homes, attack them violently, sometimes with lethal consequences, abuse animals, and vandalize property. They often do so accompanied by soldiers, or while serving as soldiers themselves, wearing uniforms and carrying military firearms.

PALESTINIAN COMMUNITIES EXPELLED SINCE 7 OCTOBER 2023



*7 October 2023 to 30 June 2026

Source: B'Tselem

In many cases, the routine of violence and intimidation turns every act of harassment into a potential catalyst for a community's flight. A donkey owned by Israelis sent to wander among village homes, incursions into yards and private lands, sending a child or teenager from the outpost to sleep next to a Palestinian home, digging graves, or placing animal carcasses in Palestinian villages or on Palestinian agricultural land are all steps along a path that ultimately leads to the communities' forced displacement. Relentless violence

eventually wears residents down until they can no longer maintain their daily lives and are forced to flee their homes.

Each community's forced displacement is a concrete act of expulsion. Taken together across the West Bank, as part of an ongoing effort to reduce the Palestinian presence and transfer land to Israeli control, these acts amount to a process of ethnic cleansing across the territory as a whole.

Difallah 'Ara'rah, 47, a father of 11 from the a-Shqarah community in the Duma area, described in his testimony how relentless settler abuse turned his life and the lives of his fellow community members into an ongoing nightmare:

> **"At the end of August, when the settlers brought their sheep to the new outpost, they began invading our area and the a-Zawahreh community, which is closer to the outpost, and that was the moment our great suffering began. [...]**
>
> **Fridays and Saturdays were the worst. Ten to 12 settlers would come, and I realized they were bringing friends to help them hurt us. On the other days of the week, between one and four settlers would come with their sheep and donkey, leave them between the homes, swear at us and try to drag us into a confrontation so they could attack us and drive us out of the area. Despite all the provocations and humiliations, we tried not to respond.**
>
> **They brought their sheep into the yards, cut water pipes, broke faucets, punctured water tanks and threw shoes into them. They took clothes off washing lines, tore them and threw them on the ground, broke windows and stole anything they could get their hands on."** Full testimony

For decades, Maryam Khalil (Daraghmeh) lived with her family in tents in Hamamat al-Maleh (Khirbet al-Maleh). Over the last three years, the family's life became an ongoing nightmare as relentless harassment, extreme violence, and extensive harm inflicted by settlers on community members and their property became part of daily life. Along with dozens of other families from the community, the Khalil's family was displaced and moved

to Tayasir in the Tubas area. In testimony to B'Tselem, the 64-year-old mother of 10, described the period leading up to the expulsion:

> "In the last three years, the occupation forces and the settlers have been putting more and more pressure on us. They brought cattle and sheep, set up outposts near us and started hounding us in every aspect of life. Gradually, we couldn't go out to graze anymore, plow land or even go a few meters away from our tents. The settlers wandered among the tents every day, sometimes with their cattle and sometimes on ATVs, armed and attacking anyone who came near the hills that provided our living for decades.
>
> They constantly threatened us and demanded that we leave the area. They emptied water tanks, broke solar panels, stole sheep, assaulted residents and sometimes brought the army to arrest us and our children. Once, they passed by me while I was baking, when the dough was on the fire, and poured it on the ground right in front of me. It was daily humiliation meant to drive us out.
>
> Over the past year, especially in recent months, the attacks really intensified, until all the families realized that we couldn't stay anymore. I cried almost every day at the thought of having to leave the place I spent my entire life in. My children saw me crying. But in the end, we felt we had no choice. We had to save our families and what was left of our source of livelihood." Full testimony

Nowhere is Safe Place: The Establishment of Outposts, Attacks, and the Expulsion of Communities from Areas A and B

> "The fact that the settlers came to my house, even though it is in Area B, and there is no settlement or outpost in the area, proves that settlers don't distinguish between Areas A, B or C. All areas are now vulnerable to incursions by settlers." Full testimony

From the testimony of Anwar 'Armush, 53, a father of six from Jalazun R.C.

Alongside the large-scale expulsion of communities from Area C, settlers have begun harassing Palestinians and driving them from their homes and land in Areas A and B as well. By March 2026, settlers had taken over 98,000 dunams in Areas A and B. As of July 2026, there were 28 outposts in Area B and one in Area A. The expansion of the dispossession mechanism into Areas A and B makes clear that ethnic cleansing is not confined to pastoral communities in Area C. Its implementation involves steadily pushing Palestinian residents out of open, agricultural, and rural areas and into dense, fragmented urban hubs, while expanding Israeli control over spaces emptied of a Palestinian presence.

This is happening, for example, in the town of 'Aqraba, which has 16,000 residents and lies in Area B between Nablus and the Jordan Valley. Since October 2023, outposts have been established on all sides of the town, severing its territorial contiguity with every surrounding village and town. Settlers have taken over a significant portion of residents' land and graze sheep there.

Samir Bani Fadel, 40, a father of six and resident of 'Aqraba, described in his testimony an attack that led to his detention for 13 days after he tried to graze his flock on land in Khirbet Twayel belonging to the town:

> "I went out with my son Jawad, fifteen, to graze our flock, about 170 sheep, in the area of Kh. Twayel. We had barely walked 300 meters when a settler ATV reached us, with a settler armed with an automatic rifle riding it. After him, four more settlers arrived on foot, two of them carrying long rifles. One of them said to me: "It's not allowed here." I replied: "Every day you prevent us from reaching a different area; where am I supposed to go?" I turned around to leave because I didn't want any trouble with the settlers, but then the four settlers who had come on foot assaulted Jawad, who was about five meters behind me. They hit him in the head with a rifle, knocked him to the ground and kept kicking him and hitting him with their rifles.
>
> I tried to protect my son, but the settler, whom I know well, fired two shots in the air from his automatic rifle to scare me. He hurled degrading curses at me and threatened to shoot me. I saw Jawad in the settlers' hands, shouting and calling for help, and I couldn't do anything. My heart broke for him. I was afraid they'd shoot him. I'm not crazy. I could not attack armed settlers." Full testimony

Mass Expulsion from Refugee Camps

In January 2025, the Israeli military launched Operation Iron Wall in the northern West Bank. The operation began with a raid on Jenin Refugee Camp and later expanded to the Tulkarm, Nur Shams, and al-Far'ah refugee camps, displacing at least 33,000 Palestinians from their homes. It was the largest displacement crisis in the West Bank since 1967. According to UNRWA data, as of September 2025, nine months after the operation began, 31,919 Palestinians from the Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nur Shams refugee camps were still displaced from their homes.

The raids on the refugee camps were large-scale military assaults that included airstrikes and extensive destruction of buildings and infrastructure. Testimonies given to B'Tselem indicate that although the military claimed there was no "official population evacuation policy," soldiers forced residents to leave their homes by threatening them verbally and with firearms. Many of those displaced had to sleep in crowded community centers or banquet halls, relying on local residents and aid organizations for food, water, and other basic necessities. Since the raids, the military has prevented them from returning to their homes despite the absence of significant military activity there (for more on the military raids on the refugee camps, see Chapter "Violence and Intimidation").

J.J., a resident of the al-Manshiyah neighborhood in Nur Shams Refugee Camp, described how his family was expelled from the camp and the uncertainty over whether they would ever be able to return home:

> **"We – men, women and children – walked an hour-and-a-half in the rain and harsh cold while our legs got covered in mud and sludge. We reached the outskirts of the neighborhood and a family who lives there received us in their yard and gave us some water to drink and with the help of the people's council of the area, took us to the town of 'Anabta. [...]**
>
> **The residents of 'Anabta have received us very kindly and helped us, but that doesn't make up for the frustration, sadness and pain being expelled from our home has caused us. We still don't know what the fate of our home is."** Full testimony

The mass expulsion and extensive destruction in the refugee camps, along with the ban on returning to them demonstrate that large-scale military operations are also tools for implementing Israel's policy of ethnic cleansing in the West Bank. The camps are emptied of residents, their built-up areas are destroyed, and displacement presented as a temporary military necessity becomes entrenched as a permanent reality.

Refugees on Their Own Land: Life after Expulsion

Land is essential to sustaining life. Taking control of it deprives the Palestinian population of the most basic means of existence and destroys the fabric of life built over generations. Displaced Palestinians are uprooted from the place where they lived, lose their homes and property, and become refugees. In many cases, they can no longer maintain their way of life or support their families.

Muhammad Dababat, 61, a father of five from the Tubas area, told B'Tselem how he and his family were expelled from Khirbet al-Farisiyah and then again from the alternative location to which they had moved, describing the effects of displacement:

> "I set up tents in the 'Einun area, brought our sheep there, and we started living there. This move was very costly. We spent more than 10,000 ILS (~ 3,335 USD). [...] We thought this area would be safer than al-Farisiyah, and we began rebuilding our lives there, but trouble followed us there as well.[...]
>
> One day, vehicles from the settlers' council, soldiers, settlers on ATVs and other Israelis came and threatened that if we didn't leave the area, they would confiscate our sheep and demolish our tents. I felt disaster had struck us. Everything went dark before my eyes, and I couldn't stand on my feet. They'd already driven me out of al-Farisiyah, and now they wanted to drive me out of this place too.
>
> We decided to look for another place, closer to Tubas, and in the end, we chose an area close to our family's land, which is surrounded by agricultural land. [...]

> The area where we live now closes in on us. The farmers need their land in order to cultivate it and make a living from it, and there is no pasture-land here where we can take the sheep." Full testimony

People who are expelled generally have to shelter in tents or temporary structures that can cost tens of thousands of shekels or find shelter with relatives. This unravels community structures and their social fabric as families scatter across different areas. Many displaced people are driven into heavy debt. Maryam Khalil, who, as noted above, was displaced with her entire family and many members of her community from Hamamat al-Maleh to Tayasir in the Tubas area, described the difficult reality of life after expulsion:

> "Life is very hard in the new area too. This is private farmland, and the landowners here obviously aren't willing to have the sheep come near their fields. We're careful, but every day we hear complaints that the sheep are eating the crops. In addition, out here, we have huge expenses for feed, water and other necessities, and life is unbearably hard.
>
> Uprooting from Hamamat al-Maleh was like a Nakba for us. We are living a new Nakba every day. The families in the community have scattered; each has moved to a different area or district. Once we lived together as neighbors and relatives. Today everyone is fighting on their own somewhere else. All my daughters lived near me, and today they are far away, and I hardly hear them say "hello" on the phone. People are exhausted, broken, asking themselves what the future holds for them. [...] What happened to us is a crime. Once we were united and lived together, and today, everyone is scattered and uprooted from their land. There is not even a sliver of hope that we can return to our place and live again in al-Maleh. The settlers are there all the time, and anyone who comes near the area is in danger." Full testimony

As Khalil describes, the impact goes beyond the loss of homes and livelihoods. Displacement breaks up communities and tears people away from their familiar and well-adapted ways of life. Difallah 'Ara'rah, whose testimony is cited above, told B'Tselem how the expulsion from his home destroyed his and his family's fabric of life:

> "Once, I lived in my home, on my land, alongside my brothers, our children and the rest of the family. Today, we have all been scattered. One brother stayed in Duma, but in another part of the village, the other moved to the Salfit area, and their children have also scattered. I don't feel at home here. We are Bedouin. We're used to living in open, quiet places, and I can't live with people I don't know. My children might get used to village life, but it's too late for my wives and me. We're not used to this life. We were pulled out by our roots, like a plant that is uprooted from the ground and thrown into the wind." Full testimony

Repeated Displacement

Even after being displaced, many Palestinians remain exposed to ongoing harassment by settlers and soldiers. As a result, many families are forced to move a second and even a third time. This happened to Maryam Khalil as well. After some time in Tayasir, where the family had moved from Hamamat al-Maleh, they discovered that settlers moved freely through the grazing areas and among the tents at their new location as well, intimidating residents there. The family was forced to move again, this time to an area north of the village of Sir in Jenin District. As Khalil tried to rebuild her family's life, integrate into yet another community, and find an alternative source of income, she discovered that the intimidation they had fled twice had become part of daily life in the new place as well:

> "The settlers kept chasing us even after we left. They came to the new area we moved to. We don't know how they got here too, but it's clear to us that they are trying to cut us off from our source of livelihood, force the livestock growers to sell their animals and leave us with nothing. [...]
>
> The settlers are armed and act with full backing from the occupation authorities. They were given cattle, sheep, feed and everything they needed to take over the area and drive us out of it. [...]
>
> No one really stands by our side. People come, officials, foreigners and international organizations, but in practice, nothing changes. The settlers keep attacking us as the world watches, and the world does nothing." Full testimony

Like Khalil and her family, 'Ali al-Faqir, 46, was forced to move with his family from the Hamamat al-Maleh area to nearby Tayasir in Tubas District. After repeated settler attacks, they too were forced to move again. In testimony to B'Tselem, al-Faqir described how the forced displacement split his family apart and destroyed the life they had known:

> "In the al-Meyteh area, we lived together, my brothers, their children and their families, my uncles and other relatives. Now everyone lives somewhere else, and the distance between us makes it hard even to visit siblings.
>
> Everything I've said can't convey more than a small part of the heartache and the mental distress caused to the families and the children. After we left, the schoolchildren didn't go to school for more than ten days. Everyone was confused; we didn't know which school to send them to, how to get there and so on. The schools are far away, so at first we had to drive them there in our cars. Because of these difficult conditions, some parents have pulled their children out of school.
>
> We've moved again and again, and now we live in areas we don't know, near people we don't know, and it's hard for us to adapt to life inside villages. We are Bedouin, sheep herders, used to living in mountainous areas, far from communities, and we're still having a hard time adjusting to the new way of life. [...]
>
> Many of us are considering selling the sheep and looking for other work, but the situation in the West Bank is difficult. There is no work, and we don't know how to do anything other than raise sheep. This is the profession we inherited from our fathers and grandfathers, and to this day, we don't see any way to earn a living and live with dignity." Full testimony

The cases described in this chapter are not merely isolated losses of homes, land, and livelihoods. They are illustrative of a systematic policy and an accelerated process of ethnic cleansing in which Israel empties extensive areas of Palestinian presence while establishing a contiguous Jewish-Israeli space. This policy is implemented through a mechanism that combines military, bureaucratic, and civilian tools and is designed to turn localized expulsions and act of dispossession into a long-term transformation of the territory and its demographic composition by erasing Palestinian existence from large areas of the West Bank.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ELIMINATION PROJECT IN THE WEST BANK

Introduction

Israel's longstanding logic of elimination in the West Bank operates through a mechanism structured around five key domains: violence and intimidation, movement and access restrictions, economic strangulation, social and political destruction, and ethnic cleansing and territorial takeover. The broad system of impunity for policymakers and perpetrators on the ground has allowed these abuses to become entrenched as a normal part of routine life under the Israeli regime. When all five domains of action are examined together, their legal significance as features of a single regime becomes clear.

The term "elimination" is not used here as a discrete legal category. Rather, it describes the governing logic underlying the various domains of action. In the West Bank, elimination takes the form of gradually and systematically destroying the conditions sustaining collective Palestinian life. International law does not define this process as a single offense, but rather identifies and prohibits the different elements that comprise it, imposing a duty to prevent and investigate these acts, and to prosecute and punish those responsible. The logic of elimination takes different shapes and operates at varying levels of intensity, with the genocide in the Gaza Strip being its most extreme form.

In B'Tselem's report Our Genocide, we documented and analyzed the genocide Israel is perpetrating against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip as a historical-political process of the deliberate destruction of a group as such. Based on detailed legal analysis by organizations and experts, B'Tselem adopted the conclusion Israel's actions meet the definition of genocide in international law.

Genocide is currently being carried out in the Gaza Strip, but the danger of genocide is not confined to Gaza exclusively. The same governing logic of elimination is applied to Palestinians in the West Bank and elsewhere. Without an effective domestic or international mechanism to stop it, genocidal violence and the practices that enable it may spread to those areas as well.

The prohibition of apartheid under international law provides the central legal framework for analyzing the West Bank as part of the Israeli regime between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Apartheid is an institutionalized regime of separation, domination, and systematic oppression imposed by one racial, ethnic, or national group on another through inhuman acts intended to establish and maintain that domination. Such a regime is applied to the entire territory under Israeli control, although it takes different forms in different areas. In the West Bank, Israel manages space, restricts movement, divides land, controls the economy, and sociopolitical life in ways that entrench Jewish supremacy and dismantle the conditions for Palestinian collective existence. At the same time, the institutional impunity Israel extends to soldiers, police officers, state authorities, and settlers makes part of a structure that helps sustaining this mechanism of control over time.

Israel's rule in the West Bank is also subject to international humanitarian law, including the law of occupation, international human rights law, other rules of international criminal law, and rules governing self-determination and the prohibition on acquiring territory by force. Together, these legal frameworks enshrine, among other things, prohibitions on annexation, settlements, deportation, and forcible transfer. They complement one another by regulating different aspects of the same system of rule.

Israel's responsibility as a state must be distinguished from the individual criminal responsibility that may attach to officials or other perpetrators. A state breach of obligations under international conventions and customary international law is serious in its own right, engages international responsibility, and requires Israel to end the violation, but it does not by itself establish the criminal responsibility of any particular individual. Some of the acts may also give rise to personal criminal responsibility for the crime of apartheid, war crimes and other crimes against humanity, depending on the facts and provided that the required legal elements set out in the Rome Statute and therefore under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court are met.

Apartheid: The Legal Test and Institutional Structure in the West Bank

International law prohibits apartheid in two related ways: as a breach that engages state responsibility and as a crime against humanity that can give rise to individual criminal responsibility. The prohibition appears in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD),[1] the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (the Apartheid Convention) of 1973, the 1998 Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court (ICC) and defines the crimes within its jurisdiction, other human rights treaties,[2] and international humanitarian law.[3]

Although the modern prohibition on apartheid developed against the backdrop of South Africa, it is not confined to that case. The Apartheid Convention expressly extends to "similar policies and practices of racial segregation."[4] The Convention, which made apartheid an international crime and declared it a crime against humanity subject to universal jurisdiction, defines it through inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over another and systematically oppressing them. Similarly, the Rome Statute defines the crime of apartheid as inhumane acts "of a character similar" to crimes against humanity listed in Article 7 of the Statute, including murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation or forcible transfer of population, imprisonment or other severe deprivation of liberty, torture, rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence, persecution, and enforced disappearance. Article 7 also covers "other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health." For apartheid, such acts must be committed within an institutionalized regime of

1. Article 3 of the Convention requires States Parties to oppose and eradicate apartheid: "States Parties particularly condemn racial segregation and apartheid and undertake to prevent, prohibit and eradicate all practices of this nature in territories under their jurisdiction."

2. Later international human rights treaties also referred expressly to apartheid. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, for example, states that "the eradication of apartheid, of all forms of racism, racial discrimination, colonialism, neo-colonialism, aggression, foreign occupation and domination" is essential to the full enjoyment of the rights of women and men alike. Treaties were also adopted prohibiting certain forms of contact with states practicing apartheid, including the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports.

3. Under Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, apartheid committed in the context of an armed conflict is also defined as a crime constituting a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions.

4. Article II of the Apartheid Convention.

systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over another, with the intention of maintaining that regime. The Apartheid Convention contains a broader express list of "inhuman acts," but the Rome Statute's residual category may encompass most of them. The apparent difference in gravity thresholds is not necessarily large in practice: Article 7 also includes persecution, defined as the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights because of group identity, as well as other inhumane acts. In this respect, the Rome Statute comes close to the conduct listed in Article II(c) of the Apartheid Convention.

Both instruments treat the connection between the regime and the inhuman acts as central to determining whether the acts amount to apartheid. The Apartheid Convention provides that the crime of apartheid includes acts committed "for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them." The Rome Statute defines the crime as acts committed "in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime." Like other crimes against humanity, the Rome Statute requires them to be committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population. In both instruments, therefore, the commission of inhuman acts is insufficient per se; they must be connected to a regime of domination and oppression and must be committed for the purpose of maintaining or establishing it.

Apartheid is not simply discrimination, unequal rights, or separation. It exists when those features are organized into an institutionalized regime of systematic domination and oppression, and when inhuman acts are committed for the purpose, or with the intention, of establishing and maintaining that regime.

The core of the definition lies in the systematic, structural, and oppressive character of the domination, oppression and discrimination, and in their connection to the goal of group domination. This institutional element, a state-sanctioned system of law, policy, and institutions, is what distinguishes apartheid from other forms of violence and prohibited discrimination.

Three elements must therefore be examined in order to determine whether a particular regime constitutes apartheid.

First, there must be distinct groups between which the regime differentiates, with the distribution of rights, status, resources, and power organized around that distinction. The legal term "racial group" in the Apartheid Convention is not limited to a biological understanding of race; it can also encompass groups that are socially and legally constructed and classified as distinct. According to Article 1(1) of ICERD, racial discrimination includes "distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin." Depending on the context, the relevant groups may also be groups that identify themselves as distinct,[5] or groups that the regime itself classifies, separates, and administers as such.

Second, there must be an institutionalized regime of systematic domination and oppression. The question is not whether there are random acts of discrimination, but whether a governmental, legal, political, and spatial structure distributes rights, duties, protections, resources, and opportunities differently among groups. This distribution produces and preserves a relationship of supremacy of one group and ongoing, forced subordination of the other. The same mechanisms need not operate identically everywhere. Different groups may be governed through different tools, provided those tools serve a common organizing principle of domination and oppression.

Third, the regime must involve inhuman acts committed to establish or maintain it. The Apartheid Convention lists, among other things, deprivation of life and liberty, serious bodily or mental harm, torture and inhuman treatment, arbitrary arrest and unlawful imprisonment, measures preventing participation in political, social, economic, and cultural life, denial of fundamental rights, creation of separate areas, expropriation of land, and persecution of organizations and individuals because they oppose apartheid. Under the Rome Statute, the threshold for the crime of apartheid is met when acts listed in Art. 7(1) or similar inhumane acts are committed as part of a "widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population." The listed inhuman acts are alternatives; not every category must be established. What must be shown is that acts of this kind form part of an institutionalized regime of systematic domination and oppression, and are

5. The view that membership in a racial group may arise from a group's self-identification as a distinct racial group was adopted in a 1990 recommendation of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and later in the jurisprudence of the international criminal tribunals for crimes committed in Rwanda (ICTR) and the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

committed for the purpose of establishing or maintaining it. They must also meet the high threshold of gravity and systematic character associated with crimes against humanity. Not every unjustified act of discrimination is an act of apartheid.

Neither convention requires proof of a racist or racial ideology as a separate condition for the crime of apartheid, although such an ideology may help drive the creation of the regime.

Over time, the prohibitions on racial discrimination and apartheid have become firmly embedded in international treaties and in the statements and decisions of international institutions. Israel is not a party to the Apartheid Convention, but it is a party to ICERD, Article 3 of which requires states to prevent, prohibit, and eradicate racial segregation and apartheid. However, Israel is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which protects many of the rights curtailed under an apartheid regime. The prohibition on Apartheid is also recognized as customary international law and therefore binds Israel regardless of its non-participation in the Apartheid Convention. The prohibition is further recognized as a peremptory norm (jus cogens), from which no derogation is permitted. Obligations arising from such norms are owed to the international community as a whole (erga omnes). A breach of the prohibition on apartheid therefore concerns not only the victims or any particular state, but the international community as a whole. In cases of serious breach, states must cooperate to bring the violation to an end, refrain from recognizing the resulting situation as lawful, and refrain from aiding or assisting in its maintenance.[6]

The Distinction Between Jews and Palestinians

In the case of the Israeli regime, for purposes of the prohibition on apartheid, the relevant groups are Jews and Palestinians. The entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River is under a single Israeli regime organized around a basic principle: maintaining Jewish supremacy over Palestinians. To that end, the regime treats Jewish Israelis and Palestinians as distinct ethno-national groups and distributes status, rights, land, movement, resources, legal protection, and political power on the basis of that

6. Under Articles 40 and 41 of the International Law Commission's Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, a serious breach of an obligation arising from a peremptory norm imposes three obligations on every state: (a) to cooperate to bring the breach to an end; (b) not to recognize as lawful the situation created by it; and (c) not to aid or assist in maintaining that situation.

distinction. Jewish citizens of Israel enjoy the full gamut of rights that come with this status, including political rights, access to state institutions, legal protections, and the ability to influence the government that determines the conditions of their lives. Jews who are not Israeli citizens are entitled under the Law of Return to immigrate to Israel and, subject to the conditions set out in this law, acquire Israeli citizenship. In some cases, they may receive residency under this eligibility. Palestinians are divided into separate legal and geographic categories: Palestinian citizens of Israel, permanent residents of East Jerusalem, West Bank residents, Gaza Strip residents, and refugees outside the territory under Israeli control. Each category is subjected to a different combination of status, law, residency rules, movement restrictions, permits, mechanisms of control, and denial of rights, including the denial of refugees' ability to return to their homeland. Fragmentation is itself a mechanism of control: by governing different Palestinian groups under different legal and administrative systems, Israel limits their ability to act as one collective bound by a common relationship to the land, history, institutions, and shared political claims.

In the West Bank, this distinction is institutionalized with particular clarity. Israeli settlers and Palestinians live in the same territory but under different systems of law, governance, rights, planning, land allocation, legal protection, and enforcement. Jewish settlers are integrated into Israel's civilian, legal, military, and political systems. They enjoy the protections of standard Israeli domestic law, civil and political rights, access to state services and resources, military and police protection and even participation in those forces. Jewish settlers have access to public infrastructure and broad freedom of movement. They are tried in Israeli civilian courts under standard domestic laws, vote in Israeli elections and help determine the composition of the Knesset and government, thereby influencing the policies applied in the West Bank. West Bank Palestinians, on the other hand, live under occupation and military rule. Their daily lives are governed by military orders, military courts, the permit regime, surveillance, enforcement, and bureaucratic controls. They do not participate in elections for the Israeli institutions that determine the conditions of their lives and have no political power over the system that controls their movement, land, livelihoods, and security.

The result is two systems of government operating in the same territory: a civilian system that grants rights and protections to Jewish-Israelis, and a repressive military system imposed on Palestinians. The legal institutional divide is integrated into the spatial, planning, and economic separation practiced in the West Bank. In this context, Israeli settlers enjoy development, infrastructure, and territorial continuity, while Palestinians

face fragmentation, movement limitations, construction restrictions, demolitions, and a planning system that stifles development. The regime thus assigns the two groups fundamentally different sets of rights and life options. One is integrated into the state's systems of rights, resources, and power; the other is kept under occupation and military control, without political rights vis-à-vis the regime that determines the conditions of its life. The distinction between the two groups, therefore, is not reduced to legal status or formal rights, but it actively shapes and cements the supremacy of Israelis and the forced subordination of Palestinians.

Given the aforesaid and as detailed in this report, the Israeli regime meets the elements of apartheid. Israel distinguishes between two groups on the basis of ethnic origin and national identity and allocates status, rights, protections, and resources differently between them; it maintains an institutionalized system of systematic domination and oppression of Palestinians; and it commits inhuman acts to establish and preserve that domination. These acts are not isolated abuses. They are part of enduring systems of control that expand and entrench Jewish-Israeli presence in the West Bank while dismantling the conditions required for Palestinians to exist there as a collective.

The five domains of action examined in the report are the principal ways this regime operates in the West Bank. Broad impunity for those who carry out the abuses allows them to persist and become routine.

Occupation, Annexation, and Settler Colonialism: The Legal and Territorial Structure of Apartheid in the West Bank

From Temporary Occupation to Permanent Control

Israel occupied the West Bank in June 1967, and the international law of occupation has applied there ever since. This body of law does not prohibit occupation as such; it sets the basic rules governing an occupation and defines the powers and duties of the occupying power. Three principles are fundamental: control of the territory is temporary; the occupier is not the sovereign; and the occupying power must maintain public order and civil life and protect the population living under occupation, which the law defines as protected persons, without frustrating its right to self-determination. Two core limits

follow. An occupier may not convert temporary control into permanent sovereignty or reshape the territory for its own benefit, and it may not alter the territory's demographic composition by transferring its own civilians into occupied territory or by deporting or forcibly transferring the protected population out of it. Either of the two may amount to war crimes and, in certain circumstances, crimes against humanity. For decades, Israel has used military rule to do precisely what the law of occupation is meant to prevent: cement its hold on the territory, establish and expand settlements, exploit land and resources, fragment Palestinian space, obstruct development, and push communities from their land, all in order to create irreversible Israeli presence in the West Bank.

In its July 2024 advisory opinion, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) held that Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful and must end as rapidly as possible. The Court based that conclusion, among other things, on violations of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, Israel's settlement and annexation policies, and the prohibition on acquiring territory by force. The legal significance is substantial: the violation no longer lies only in particular acts carried out under occupation, but also in the unlawfulness of Israel's continued presence itself. The advisory opinion does not displace the law of occupation for as long as Israel continues to control the territory and the Palestinian population. At the same time, the law of occupation no longer offers a complete legal framework for understanding Israeli rule in the West Bank. The violations extend beyond breaches of an occupying power's duties. According to the analysis presented in this report, military occupation is a central instrument through which Israel maintains an apartheid regime in the West Bank, and the inhuman acts carried out by Israeli authorities within that regime and for its preservation meet the elements of the crime against humanity of apartheid.

For decades, the Israeli military has been the arm through which the state exercises governing powers over Palestinians in the occupied territories. Military orders, military courts, the permit regime, and bureaucratic systems of enforcement and control govern Palestinian life within a framework separate from the one governing Jewish-Israelis in the same territory. The military gives institutional form to the division between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians and to the separate and unequal systems of rights applied to them. Palestinians in the West Bank are subjected to military rule, without citizenship or political representation in the regime that determines the conditions of their lives; Israeli settlers are integrated into Israel's civilian, legal, planning, military, and political systems.

Occupation and military rule over Palestinians are therefore the operative machinery of separation, oppression, and domination within the apartheid regime.

Annexation and Settlements: Entrenching Control and Reshaping Space

Annexation does not require a formal declaration of sovereignty. De facto annexation can arise when a state exercises sovereign powers in an occupied territory, integrates it into its legal and administrative systems, and establishes permanent control over it. Over the course of the occupation, Israel has advanced the de facto annexation of large parts of the West Bank by establishing and expanding settlements, connecting them to Israeli infrastructure, services, and to state funding, and extending extensive parts of Israeli law and its protections to settlers. The military regime imposed on Palestinians has remained in place alongside this process rather than being replaced by it.

In recent years, legal and administrative changes have deepened this process and brought it closer to de jure annexation, while "applying sovereignty" to the territories features prominently in Israeli public discourse. Powers affecting settlers in areas such as planning, enforcement, land, infrastructure, outposts, and settlements have been extracted from the military administration or placed under civilian officials in the Israeli government. In May 2024, numerous administrative powers were transferred from the head of the Civil Administration to the deputy head of the Civil Administration for civilian matters, an official operating within a civilian structure in the Ministry of Defense; the office of legal advisor in these fields was also moved from a military framework into a government one. The effect is to integrate the administration of the occupied territory ever more deeply into the civilian, legal, and bureaucratic machinery of the State of Israel itself.

Settlements are central to this process. International law prohibits an occupying power from transferring parts of its civilian population into occupied territory in order to prevent the demographic transformation of the occupied territory, prevent the occupier from using the territory to its own benefit, and protect the occupied population's ability to exercise self-determination. In the West Bank, settlements are used to produce precisely the outcomes that prohibition is designed to prevent. Israel allocates land, water, infrastructure, and funding to establish, expand, and protect settlements; builds roads; defines jurisdictional areas; and maintains a military presence on their behalf.

The resulting system entrenches Israeli presence, fragments Palestinian space, restricts Palestinian movement, blocks Palestinian construction and development, and pushes Palestinian communities from their land. Israeli settlements are also established with the stated aim of breaking Palestinian territorial contiguity and preventing the future establishment of a Palestinian state.

Settlements and annexation therefore work in tandem. Settlements create and expand Israeli presence in the territory; annexation draws the territory and the settlers into state institutions, entrenches the resulting changes, and turns them into a permanent order. Palestinians, meanwhile, remain under a separate military regime and without political rights vis-à-vis the regime that determines their lives. The result is the separation of population groups across one contiguous territory under Israeli control, while the possibility of a contiguous, independent Palestinian territorial and political existence is steadily dismantled.

The Relationship Between Occupation, Annexation, Apartheid, and Settler Colonialism

Several complementary legal frameworks and concepts are needed to analyze Israeli rule in the West Bank, because each captures a different layer of the same governing structure. The law of occupation is the legal framework that applies to Israel's control of the West Bank, while military occupation is the mechanism through which the Palestinian population is governed. Annexation is the process that entrenches Israeli control over the territory, narrows the possibility of reversing it, blurs the boundary between occupied territory and sovereign Israel, and incorporates the territory into state institutions. Settlements expand Israeli civilian presence and reshape the territory in ways that break Palestinian territorial contiguity and obstruct the future establishment of a Palestinian state. Apartheid is the form of regime that structures relations between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians throughout the entire area under Israeli control.

The ICJ's July 2024 advisory opinion reinforces the conclusion that these legal frameworks are complementary rather than competing. The Court examined Israel's control of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, through the law of occupation, the prohibition on annexation, the right to self-determination, and the prohibition on racial discrimination. It

held that Israeli legislation and policies impose and maintain an almost complete separation between settler communities and Palestinian communities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and that this violates Article 3 of the ICERD, which prohibits racial segregation and apartheid.

In Israel's case, apartheid describes the form of rule; settler colonialism describes its political logic; and the Elimination Project describes the purpose and direction of that logic: expanding Israeli presence and control while dismantling the conditions required for Palestinians to sustain a collective territorial and political existence.

Settler colonialism is not a legal term of art in international law and does not, by itself, constitute an offense under international criminal law. Yet many of the mechanisms by which it is implemented are prohibited under international law. The post-WWII system was shaped, among other things, by the recognition of peoples' right to self-determination and by the breakdown of the global colonial order. Those principles found expression in the UN Charter and in the decolonization process that accelerated through the 1970s, particularly in General Assembly Resolution 1514 of 1960, the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. The resolution states that subjecting peoples to alien domination denies human rights and contravenes the UN Charter, and calls for colonialism in all its forms to be brought to a speedy and unconditional end. Resolution 1514 reflects both the development of the principle of self-determination and the emergence of an anti-colonial international order, which included the prohibition on apartheid. Within that order, international law prohibits acquiring territory by force and annexing occupied territory. The law of occupation also prohibits transferring the occupier's population into occupied territory, as well as deportation out of it and forcible transfer inside it, while the laws pertaining to apartheid prohibit the institutionalization of race-based control. Each of these may function as a mechanism of settler colonialism, and each is prohibited under international law.

The Five Domains of Action in Israel's Elimination Project in the West Bank as Inhuman Acts under Apartheid

Israel's apartheid regime in the West Bank is sustained through enduring and deliberate systems that organize Palestinian life around control, separation, and oppression. The Elimination Project operates through five central domains of action: violence and intimidation, movement restrictions, economic strangulation, social and political destruction, and ethnic cleansing and territorial takeover.[7]

The sections below examine how each domain of action corresponds to categories of inhuman acts listed in the Apartheid Convention, and how the conduct it encompasses serves to establish and maintain the regime. Impunity for perpetrators, including the fact that they are not called to account for their actions, is not treated as a separate domain of action. Rather, it is a structural feature of the regime and an expression of the distinction between the groups: those who harm Palestinians on behalf of the state or under its protection receive broad institutional backing, while Palestinians are left without effective legal protection. Impunity also creates the conditions in which the five domains of action can persist, become entrenched, and settle into the routine operation of the regime.

Violence and Intimidation: Deprivation of Life, Liberty, and Personal Safety

Article II(a) of the Apartheid Convention lists the "denial to a member or members of a racial group or groups of the right to life and liberty of person" in the context of a regime of systematic oppression. The provision includes "murder," the infliction of "serious bodily or mental harm," infringements of "freedom or dignity," "torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," and "arbitrary arrest and illegal imprisonment." Article 7(2)(h) of the Rome Statute likewise places murder, torture, persecution, imprisonment, and other severe deprivations of liberty among the inhumane acts relevant to the crime of apartheid. Persecution, in this context, means the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights because of the identity of the group.

7. Some of these mechanisms were described in the parallel report submitted to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination by a coalition of Palestinian human rights NGOs in 2019. They have since greatly intensified. See also the analyses in reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Legal scholars John Dugard and John Reynolds note that South African apartheid law permitted indefinite detention without trial for interrogation, a system that led to widespread torture and unexplained deaths. Administrative detention was also legally available, though it was not used on a large scale. Emergency powers were invoked in 1960 and again from 1985 through 1990. Freed from judicial oversight and political accountability, the security police committed killings and torture and was responsible for the disappearance of political activists. What South Africa largely did not have, however, was an open, authorized policy of planned killings comparable to Israel's policy toward Palestinians it designates as targets, known in Israel as "eliminations" or "targeted killings." South African apartheid security forces did sometimes kill dissidents arbitrarily and covertly, but generally preferred to prosecute them, in part because treason and terrorism were capital offenses.

Viewed through the apartheid framework, violence and intimidation in the West Bank perform two functions at once: they deprive Palestinians of life, liberty, and personal safety, and at the same time, they operate as standing instruments for preserving domination, oppression, and political repression. The violence is not a collection of exceptional or isolated incidents. It forms part of an organized system of control through which Israel enforces its hold over the territory, advances settlement and annexation, and suppresses Palestinian resistance. The means include use of firearms and other lethal force, military raids, arrest and imprisonment, torture and abuse, destruction of homes and infrastructure, collective punishment, and settler violence carried out under state protection. Israel also arms and mobilizes civilians, with the military assisting them or law enforcement failing to intervene.

Physical violence and killing are not prerequisites for an act of apartheid under either the Apartheid Convention or the Rome Statute. In the West Bank, however, they are among the gravest violations of fundamental rights and among the principal means by which political repression is maintained. The intimidation generated by such acts narrows the range of action available to individuals and to Palestinian society as a whole, making violence an especially effective means of preserving the regime.

Since October 2023, violence in the West Bank has escalated in scale, intensity, and pattern. The distinction between soldiers, armed civilians, and settlement security squads has increasingly blurred. From the perspective of Palestinians living under threat, they

form one apparatus of violence operating with the backing of the state and military and serving the expansion of Israeli control and the shrinking Palestinian space. The effects reach far beyond killing, injury, and arrest. Violence creates widening circles of constant uncertainty: soldiers may raid a home; settlers may enter grazing land; a person may be arrested or beaten; a home or access road may be destroyed; a vital water pipe may be put out of service; or access to medical care, work, or school may be blocked. Under such conditions, every ordinary activity becomes a risk calculation, and intimidation is built into daily life under Israeli control.

Under both the Apartheid Convention and the Rome Statute, violence of this kind falls within the inhuman acts through which a regime of domination and oppression is maintained. Taken together, these acts show that violence is a basic component of the elimination mechanism, not a departure from it.

Movement Restrictions: Fragmentation, Separation, and Exclusion

Article II(c) of the Apartheid Convention includes among the inhuman acts "legislative measures and other measures calculated to prevent a racial group or groups from participation in the political, social, economic and cultural life," as well as the "deliberate creation of conditions preventing the full development" of the group. The provision specifically refers to the right to work, the right to education, the right to leave and return to one's country, freedom of movement and residence, freedom of expression, and freedom of association. Article II(d) separately addresses measures designed to divide a population along group lines, including the creation of separate geographic areas and enclaves and the expropriation of land.

Legal scholar Miles Jackson emphasizes that racial domination may sometimes be an end in itself, but an apartheid regime may also pursue an objective that international law recognizes as legitimate, such as national security, public order, or governmental stability. A legitimate objective cannot justify measures that have no real connection to it; the use of such measures against the oppressed group is a strong indication that the state is pursuing racial domination. Even measures genuinely connected to security can still form part of apartheid if the state chooses a system of racial domination as the means of securing public order or national security.

Jackson further notes that an oft-heard critique of international criminal law and transitional justice is that their focus on visible, individualized violence, such as killing, torture, and bodily harm, committed in discrete atrocities involving identifiable perpetrators and victims makes it harder to identify "slow" or structural violence. This type of violence includes poverty produced by policy, institutionalized inequality, cumulative harm to education, unequal allocation of land and resources, exclusion from the labor market and more. The prohibition on apartheid is an important exception, Jackson argues, because it assigns particular normative gravity to a system of harm that need not involve killing or bodily injury. On this account, the core of the prohibition lies not in individualized physical violence, but in measures that prevent a group from participating in political, social, economic, and cultural life and obstruct its full development.

Dugard and Reynolds, examining the sustained denial of Palestinians' ability to participate in political, social, economic, and cultural life, as documented, in part, in B'Tselem reports, argue that the breadth and consistency of these violations indicate a system of control rather than a series of isolated incidents, one that subordinates Palestinians in the occupied territory and suppresses resistance. The web of vague, inaccessible military orders and bureaucratic restrictions, racialized not necessarily in writing but in how they are implemented on the ground, via roadblocks and soldiers, makes Israel's discrimination less overt than South Africa's, where explicit racial legislation made the regime's discriminatory intent more openly declared in some sense. The contrast is especially clear in the West Bank's "road apartheid," which has no South African equivalent. Israel has created separate and unequal road networks for settlers and Palestinians without a clear legal basis or the official signs that, in South Africa, marked parks, buses, beaches, and other public facilities as reserved for whites. Movement restrictions in the West Bank work in two directions. They prevent Palestinians from moving freely through the area in which they live, restricting access to work, education, health care, family, land, public institutions, and political and social life. At the same time, they break Palestinian space into disconnected enclaves, obstruct future development, and make movement dependent on arbitrary decisions by the military, the Civil Administration, the police, settlers, and the permit regime.

The chapter on movement restrictions details the practices through which this system operates in the West Bank. Their legal significance lies in their combined effect as a permanent mechanism of separation, control, fragmentation, and blocked development.

The harm extends well beyond road blocking. Denial of access to farmland undermines livelihoods, food security, ties to the land, legal rights in the land, and community life. Blocking the route to a university or hospital impairs the rights to education and health and may also endanger the right to life. Cutting communities off from one another weakens their ability to sustain common political, social, and cultural life. Together, these restrictions create living conditions that keep the focus on survival and stymie individual or collective development.

The Israeli regime does not restrict movement in the West Bank equally. Israeli settlers living in settlements are served by roads, infrastructure, and state protections that connect them to Israel and to the wider settlement network. Many of those roads and infrastructure projects have been built at the expense of Palestinian territorial contiguity, on expropriated Palestinian land and in violation of the law of occupation and international human rights law. Palestinians, meanwhile, face an arbitrary network of checkpoints, roadblocks, permits, delays, and inspections, together with exposure to violence and constant uncertainty. The same system that secures continuity and access for Jewish-Israelis produces fragmentation, dependence, and vulnerability for Palestinians.

Within the apartheid framework, movement restrictions in the West Bank are among the inhuman acts through which a regime of domination and oppression is maintained. They directly impair freedom of movement and residence and other rights expressly protected by the Convention, and they restrict Palestinians' ability to participate in economic, social, cultural, and political life.

Economic Strangulation: Denial of Livelihood, Development, and Economic Independence

Article II(c) of the Apartheid Convention includes among the inhuman acts "legislative measures and other measures calculated to prevent a racial group or groups from participation in the political, social, economic and cultural life," as well as the "deliberate creation of conditions preventing the full development" of the group. Among the rights named in the provision are the right to work, the right to education, and freedom of movement and residence. Economic strangulation in the West Bank falls within this legal framework because it excludes Palestinians from economic life, obstructs the

development of Palestinian society, and erodes the material conditions required to sustain collective life.[8]

Jackson emphasizes the breadth of Article II(c). The provision is not limited to physical violence, detention, or killing; it can encompass any measure that prevents members of a group from participating fully in social life or that prevents the group's full development. Where the conduct violates international law and the required specific purpose is established, examples could include the systematic underfunding of the group's schools or denial of equal access to public resources and institutions.

Dugard and Reynolds point out that the South African apartheid regime actively invested in material conditions in the Bantustans, spending substantial resources on infrastructure, roads, schools and establishing and subsidizing universities and hospitals. Nevertheless, claims that apartheid, or "separate development" as it was called after 1960, reflected self-determination could not disguise the regime's discriminatory and oppressive character; they amounted to apologetic rhetoric about self-determination and the "decolonization of the Bantustans."

Unlike South Africa, Dugard and Reynolds note that the institutionalized and systematic character of Israeli rule is especially evident in Israel's failure to provide for the welfare of the Palestinian population or to develop and maintain hospitals, schools, and universities for the protected persons, despite an arguable duty to do so under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel has instead left the welfare of the occupied population largely to international donors, creating dependence on international aid while withholding the resources needed for social, economic, and cultural development. Combined with the systematic, oppressive, and discriminatory commission of inhuman acts, that failure is further evidence of an intention to preserve Israeli domination over Palestinians.

8. Article II(e) of the Apartheid Convention addresses the exploitation of the labor of members of a group, in particular by submitting them to forced labor. The deep dependence of Palestinian workers on the Israeli labor market and on permits granted by Israel is an important part of the structure of economic control and a result of the deliberate prevention of development of the Palestinian economy. However, not every form of economic dependence amounts to forced labor, and establishing such a claim would require a separate legal and factual examination. For the present analysis, the main argument rests on Article II(c) of the Convention: preventing participation in economic life and creating conditions that prevent the full development of the group.

Economic strangulation is not adequately described by falling incomes, unemployment, or poverty alone. Its effects reach the conditions Palestinians need to live, earn a livelihood, support families and institutions, provide services, cultivate land, study, obtain medical care, and plan for the future. When harm of this kind is imposed systematically on a distinct group within a regime of domination and oppression, it becomes one of the inhuman acts through which the regime of apartheid is maintained.

Economic strangulation in the West Bank rests on dependencies built over decades. Since 1967, Israel has controlled the principal factors shaping the Palestinian economy: land, water, and natural resources; planning; movement; border crossings; imports and exports; employment in Israel and the settlements; the permit regime; infrastructure; and access to higher education and vocational training. Control also extends to the financial system and to Palestinian Authority tax revenues through arrangements that give Israel power over those funds. The resulting dependence is not a separate economic failing; it is a deliberately constructed structural dependence that serves as a mechanism of control. Since October 2023, Israel has used these economic levers with exceptional intensity, turning structural dependence into broad economic strangulation and, among other consequences, undermining the Palestinian Authority's ability to provide public services. The PA is not an independent sovereign but a limited body operating under extensive Israeli control. When Israel uses its power over PA revenues, the banking system, movement, and crossings to damage the Palestinian economy and impair the PA's ability to pay salaries, run services, maintain schools, universities, vocational training programs, and other institutions, and meet basic needs, the impact is not merely budgetary or institutional. It reaches directly into Palestinians' daily lives and their society's ability to sustain public systems.

Under the prohibition on apartheid, economic strangulation in the West Bank is therefore one of the inhuman acts through which domination and oppression are maintained. It restricts participation in economic, social, and political life and impairs the development of Palestinian society as a group.

Social and Political Destruction: Denial of Collective Life, Participation, and Resistance

Article II(c) of the Apartheid Convention includes among the inhuman acts "legislative measures and other measures calculated to prevent a racial group or groups from participation in the political, social, economic and cultural life," together with the "deliberate creation of conditions preventing the full development" of the group. The provision specifically refers, among other rights, to education, freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Article II(f) separately covers the "persecution of organizations and persons, by depriving them of fundamental rights and freedoms, because they oppose apartheid."

Social and political destruction in the West Bank falls directly within this framework. Israel restricts, criminalizes, and dismantles the means through which Palestinians can function as a society: organizing, protesting, documenting, learning and teaching, publishing, preserving memory, maintaining institutions, expressing a collective identity, and articulating political demands. The harm goes beyond restrictions on parties, political movements, or demonstrations. It reaches the infrastructure that allows Palestinian society to exist as a collective with institutions, knowledge, culture, a historical narrative, representation, and a political horizon.

Since 1967, Israel has maintained an extensive legal and security apparatus in the West Bank that allows it to criminalize many forms of Palestinian political organization and action. Emergency regulations, military orders, Military Order 101, which imposes severe restrictions on Palestinian freedom of expression and protest in the West Bank, declarations of associations as unlawful, arrests and imprisonment all narrow the avenues through which Palestinians can organize, protest, represent themselves, defend their rights, or articulate collective political demands. The same mechanisms are directed at civil society organizations, human rights defenders, unions, community initiatives, journalists, educational institutions, and cultural spaces, as well as activity relating to memory, heritage, religion, and refugee status. These are among the means through which Palestinians organize and define themselves as a society and a people, pass knowledge between generations, document abuses, and coordinate common political action. Attacking those means weakens their ability to resist Israeli control, expose its abuses, create and sustain social and political activity, and work toward a collective future.

The legal significance of these practices is not exhausted by treating each as a separate violation of freedom of expression, association, privacy, education, or cultural life. Together, they create a regime in which Palestinians are excluded from the political power that shapes their lives while their ability to organize, oppose repression, and claim rights is itself constrained.

Under the prohibition on apartheid, these practices amount to preventing participation in political, social, and cultural life and creating conditions that obstruct the group's full development. When they target Palestinian organizations, activists, journalists, human rights defenders, or institutions because those actors oppose the regime of control, document its abuses, or work to realize collective rights, they may also fall under Article II(f) of the Apartheid Convention, which addresses persecution of opponents of apartheid. Unlike the other categories in Article II, Article II(f) does not require the persecuted person to belong to the group subjected to domination and oppression; it can apply to any person or organization persecuted for opposing the apartheid regime.

Ethnic Cleansing and Territorial Takeover: Land, Settlements, Annexation, and Forcible Transfer

Article II(d) of the Apartheid Convention addresses measures designed to "divide the population along racial lines" through the creation of "separate reserves and ghettos" and through the "expropriation of landed property belonging to a racial group or groups or to members thereof." In the West Bank, taking over land, denying Palestinians access to it, and preventing its use for development serve this same logic: a contiguous, developing, protected space for Jewish-Israelis, and a fragmented, restricted, vulnerable, and dependent one for Palestinians.

Control of land and space affects far more than private or public property rights. It undermines the conditions Palestinians need to live as communities and as a collective with territorial continuity, a local economy, institutions, family life, ties to the land, and the possibility of a political future. The legal significance of spatial control must therefore be assessed not only plot by plot, but also through the cumulative effect of mechanisms that create one kind of space for Jewish-Israelis and another for Palestinians. For decades, Israel has used legal, military, planning, and bureaucratic tools to take over land and

prevent Palestinians from using or developing it. The same system facilitates construction, infrastructure, development, and spatial continuity for Jewish-Israelis while preventing Palestinians from building, connecting to infrastructure, expanding communities, cultivating land, and maintaining continuity between localities.

Settlements, outposts, and farms are among the principal mechanisms for reorganizing the territory. The state allocates land, water, and funding to them, builds infrastructure and roads for their residents, defines jurisdictional areas, maintains a military presence, and provides tools of control and enforcement. In recent years, outposts and farm outposts have increasingly been used to take control of large areas and push Palestinian communities out, with state authorities providing funding, protection, weapons, infrastructure connections, and legal backing. Annexation entrenches these processes by integrating the territory, settlements, and settlers ever more deeply into the State of Israel, while Palestinians in the West Bank remain subject to a separate and repressive military regime.

A central feature of the takeover of land is the creation of conditions that empty particular areas of Palestinians or sharply reduce their presence. Coercive measures imposed by state authorities, or by settler militias acting under state protection, force communities from their homes or deter Palestinians from accessing farmland, grazing areas, and sources of livelihood. Forcible transfer does not require direct expulsion using physical force. It can also occur when the state, or actors operating under its protection, creates a coercive environment in which remaining becomes impossible or unreasonable. When such a pattern is directed at removing a particular ethnic or national group from an area, it is commonly described as ethnic cleansing. International criminal law does not define ethnic cleansing as a separate offense, but the underlying acts may, depending on the circumstances, constitute crimes against humanity or war crimes, including deportation, forcible transfer, persecution, attacks on civilians, destruction of property, and other crimes. In the West Bank, this pattern forms part of both the apartheid regime and the Elimination Project: reducing Palestinian presence, expanding Jewish-Israeli presence, breaking up the continuity of Palestinian life by pushing Palestinians into enclaves, and making continued life in the area dependent, precarious, and futureless.

Under the prohibition on apartheid, the takeover of space is directly connected to the prohibitions on creating separate areas and enclaves, instituting territorial segregation, and expropriating land belonging to a group or to its members.

Additional Legal Implications

Each of the five domains of action described above includes conduct that falls within categories of inhuman acts listed in the Apartheid Convention, and its legal significance must be assessed as part of an institutionalized regime of systematic domination and oppression. The same conduct may also carry independent legal consequences. Depending on the facts and the applicable legal threshold, it may violate the law of occupation or international human rights law and may also constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity. Relevant offenses can include unlawful killing, torture, unlawful imprisonment, collective punishment, persecution, deportation, forcible transfer, and destruction of property. Severe and intentional deprivation of rights, when systematically directed against Palestinians because of their group identity, may also form part of persecution as a crime against humanity. The cumulative meaning of these acts makes clear that they cannot be understood only as separate violations, but rather as integrated systems of action through which the apartheid regime is maintained and the Elimination Project advanced.

Impunity and Lack of Accountability as a Mechanism that Sustains the Regime

Impunity as a Regime Mechanism

The Apartheid Convention does more than prohibit the inhuman acts that constitute the crime of apartheid. By defining apartheid as a crime against humanity, it also requires state parties to take measures to suppress and prevent it and to punish those responsible. A state's duties therefore extend beyond refraining from inhuman acts: it must seek to prevent and investigate them, prosecute those responsible, and take steps to prevent recurrence.

"Impunity" is used here to describe a persistent, systematic absence of accountability together with institutional protection for perpetrators, including soldiers, police officers, prison guards, Shin Bet personnel, and civilians. Formal legal immunity is not required. In the West Bank, Israel's protection of soldiers, police officers, and settlers from investigation, prosecution, suspension, or dismissal after harming Palestinians is itself part of the systematic nature of the mechanism of control. It allows violence, dispossession, forcible transfer, movement restrictions, and political repression to continue, while conveying to

Palestinians that the prospect of an effective investigation, punishment, or remedy is, in practice, negligible to nonexistent.

Impunity is not restricted to punishment after the fact. It produces conditions in which perpetrators can expect the system to stand behind them by legitimizing their act, presenting it as a lawful security measure, delaying an investigation, or closing the case. In that sense, impunity is one of the conditions that enable and perpetuate the commission of inhuman acts within the apartheid regime.

A Veneer of Legality, Non-Enforcement, and Whitewashing

Part of this impunity is built into the state's ordinary modes of action. Measures taken by the military, police, Shin Bet, Civil Administration, and other authorities are framed from the outset as security, administrative, or lawful measures. Military orders, legal advice, internal procedures, the use of terms such as "proportionality," and limited judicial review provide a veneer of legality for harm inflicted on Palestinians. Violence, arrest, destruction, restrictions on movement, land expropriation, and interference with political organizing can therefore be presented as legitimate responses to security needs even though they function as core tools of a regime of domination, separation, and oppression.

That legal veneer allows most abuses to occur as a matter of course without requiring accountability from the state. When a particular incident attracts media attention or public or international criticism, the state can present it as lawful and justified. When that is not possible, the incident can be recast as a mistake or an isolated deviation, with the response limited to an inquiry, reprimand, or "clarification of procedures." This builds structural impunity: actions initiated, authorized, or enabled by the system are not examined as policy, and recognition of responsibility, if any, is narrow and usually imputed to a low-ranking scapegoat.

Impunity continues after the fact through near-total failures of enforcement, including in cases of violence that exceeds even the regime's ordinary justifications. Between 2016 and 2024, 2,427 complaints concerning harm by soldiers to Palestinians or their property were brought before the military law enforcement system. Investigations were opened in only 552 cases, 22.7% of all complaints; indictments were filed in only 23 cases, 0.9%. When soldiers kill Palestinians, the likelihood of an indictment is even lower.

The same pattern appears in cases involving violence by Israelis against Palestinians. According to Yesh Din data for 2005-2025, 93.6% of police investigation files concerning ideologically motivated offenses by Israelis against Palestinians were closed without an indictment, and only 3% ended in a full or partial conviction. Calls by Palestinians or activists for police or military assistance frequently fail to produce protection for the victims. In some cases, forces protect the attackers, take action against the Palestinians who are harmed, or take part in the violence themselves.

Barriers to filing complaints are themselves part of the system. Palestinians know that the chances of an effective investigation and accountability are negligible, and past experience may give them reason to fear that complaining will bring further harassment, harm to relatives, or loss of permits. When the institution receiving the complaint is part of the same regime that controls the complainant's daily life, seeking its protection can be both dangerous and futile.

For decades, B'Tselem asked the military law enforcement system to investigate soldiers who harmed Palestinians. In May 2016, the organization stopped submitting complaints after concluding that the system did not operate as an effective mechanism for protecting Palestinians or holding perpetrators accountable. Instead, it functioned as a whitewashing mechanism that created the appearance of an independent and effective system of investigation.

Since October 2023: Open Impunity and the Normalization of Violence

Since October 2023, impunity has become increasingly open and blatant. Violence that was once denied or concealed is now often carried out in front of cameras, documented by perpetrators themselves, circulated on social media, and presented as an achievement. Even clear documentation and known identities rarely lead to an effective investigation or accountability. The shift shows that violence is no longer treated as conduct to be concealed, but has become a visible and normalized feature of the regime.

This shift is evident in the attacks and reports on attacks now routinely posted on social media channels associated with settlers and right-wing activists. A post published in late October 2025 on the "Hilltop Youth" Telegram channel under the heading "Summary

of the Struggle Against the Arab Enemy in the Holy Land During the Month of Tishrei" claimed that 55 Palestinian villages had been attacked in more than 90 incidents that month. According to the post, 33 vehicles and 12 homes were burned, 25 Palestinians were injured, and thousands of olive trees were cut down, in addition to other damage. The acts were presented as achievements, not as offenses whose exposure might carry consequences. The public documentation, tallying, and celebration of the attacks illustrate both the normalization of violence and the absence of fear that exposing it will lead to punishment. Institutional protection for settlers who harm Palestinians has also become more explicit. In November 2023, it was reported that a document by the head of Central Command, enclosing an assessment from senior Shin Bet officials, warned that the Israel Police was refraining from enforcing the law against far-right activists following a directive from the national security minister. The police denied receiving such a directive. In November 2024, Defense Minister Israel Katz announced that administrative detention orders would no longer be used against settlers. In July 2025, Judea and Samaria District Police commander Moshe Pinchi stated that "protecting the Israeli settlements is more vital than law and order" and said that police presence in the West Bank " is needed because of the settlements." The same trend has appeared in other security bodies. In April 2026, security establishment sources reported that since David Zini became head of the Shin Bet, resources devoted to the division dealing with Jewish violence and terrorism had been reduced and that Zini downplays the importance of settler attacks on Palestinians. Taken together, these measures, statements, and patterns show that weak enforcement cannot be explained simply as institutional failure. The state arms settlers and integrates them into security frameworks, refrains from effectively enforcing the law against them, scales back tools intended to prevent violence and punish perpetrators, and weakens oversight mechanisms. The result is an environment in which violence against Palestinians is treated as tolerable and protected, and at times fits into policies aimed at expanding Israeli control and pushing Palestinians from the area.

Impunity and lack of accountability are therefore integral to the structure of control Israel has created, and they effectively allow and encourage the commission of inhuman acts of the kind defined in Article II of the Apartheid Convention. Repeated abuses that go uninvestigated and unpunished, coupled with institutional, legal, and political backing for perpetrators, strengthen the conclusion that the conduct forms part of an institutionalized regime of systematic domination and oppression rather than a series of exceptional or isolated incidents.

Beyond the prohibition on apartheid itself, international law requires states to prevent serious violations of that prohibition, investigate them, prosecute those responsible, provide remedies to victims, and ensure that the violations do not recur.[9] Israel's failure to meet those obligations in the face of systematic harm to Palestinians is not an isolated enforcement failure. It forms a systematic pattern that protects the abuses and allows them to continue as part of the apartheid regime. The consistency of this policy also deters victims from filing complaints and further strips the dominated group of effective legal protection.

In the West Bank, impunity ties the different domains of elimination together. It enables and encourages violence, sustains movement restrictions, facilitates economic strangulation, weakens political and social organizing, and legitimizes the takeover of space. By allowing these mechanisms to operate over time without effective accountability, impunity helps turn them into routine features of Israel's apartheid regime.

Conclusion: The Cumulative Legal Significance of the Elimination Project in the West Bank

Across the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, one Israeli apartheid regime structures relations between Israeli-Jews and Palestinians through unequal allocations of status, rights, resources, and political power. This report focuses on the West Bank and examines how that regime operates there. Palestinians in the West Bank are subjected to military rule, while Jewish-Israelis living in the same territory are governed by standard Israeli domestic law and enjoy full civil and political rights. The regime is also maintained through inhuman acts committed to preserve systematic domination and oppression. Violence and intimidation, movement restrictions, economic strangulation, social and political destruction, and ethnic cleansing and territorial takeover are the principal domains of action through which Israeli apartheid operates in the West Bank. Broad impunity for perpetrators of these abuses allows these domains of action to persist and become entrenched as defining features of Palestinian life under Israeli rule.

---

9. See Article 2(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Article 6 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 31, paras. 15-18; Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation, G.A. Res. 60/147 (2005).

The law of occupation continues to apply in the West Bank, but it is neither an alternative to the apartheid framework nor, on its own, sufficient to capture the full legal picture. Military control is the principal instrument through which the apartheid regime operates in the West Bank; annexation and settlements entrench Israeli control and reshape the territory and its demographic composition; and Israel's continued control violates the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. Together, these mechanisms form part of a settler-colonial project aimed at expanding and institutionalizing a permanent Israeli presence in the territory while displacing and eliminating Palestinian existence from the same space.

The "Elimination Project" is a term that describes the cumulative significance of the apartheid regime together with policies and acts that international law recognizes and prohibits, including annexation, settlement construction, forcible transfer, persecution, systematic violence, and the denial of fundamental rights. In the West Bank, these mechanisms expand Israeli control and establish Jewish supremacy while dismantling the conditions Palestinians need to exist as a collective with territorial continuity, institutions, social life, an economic base, and the capacity to work toward a political future. This is the cumulative legal significance of the Elimination Project in the West Bank.

6. CONCLUSION

This report is being finalized at a time when Israel is rapidly dismantling the conditions necessary for Palestinians to sustain life in the West Bank. Over the past nearly three years, the harm inflicted on Palestinians in the West Bank has intensified and expanded, becoming deeper, more widespread, and increasingly overt. Palestinians are killed, their homes are set on fire, the roads they rely on are blocked, families are violently attacked, communities are dispossessed of their land, and fear and terror continue to spread. The West Bank is under a sweeping Israeli assault, and there is no political force in sight working to end the escalation.

The report takes up a question raised by the current moment: How should we interpret and analyze the human catastrophe currently unfolding in the West Bank? It does so by unpacking the mechanism of oppression Israel employs against Palestinians, understanding how it operates, and analyzing the logic of elimination that guides it and the political objectives it serves. Our premise is that human rights violations do not occur in a vacuum. Protecting people from the violence of the regime that controls them requires understanding not only how the mechanisms that harm them operate in daily life but also the system and political logic that produce them.

To this end, the report brings together two perspectives. The first examines five interconnected domains through which Israel acts against Palestinians in the West Bank: violence and intimidation, movement restrictions, economic strangulation, social and political destruction, and ethnic cleansing and territorial takeover. Each causes profound harm to people's lives, but their full significance becomes clear when they are examined together. They reinforce one another and dismantle the conditions necessary for Palestinians to exist as individuals, as communities, and as a political and social collective.

The second perspective situates this mechanism within the broader regime project in which it operates. Israel's actions must be understood within the framework of settler colonialism: a political project that seeks to establish the permanent sovereignty of a settler population in an area inhabited by an Indigenous people by pushing them aside, dispossessing them, and dismantling their collective existence. In the Israeli case, apartheid is the regime structure that organizes Jewish supremacy and Israeli control over Palestinians. The logic

of elimination, an orientation toward dismantling Palestinians' ability to exist as a people with a connection to the land, institutions, political power, memory, rights, and a claim to a future, operates within this structure.

Examining these two planes together reveals the double movement of the Elimination Project in the West Bank: Israel dismantles Palestinian existence while simultaneously reorganizing the space to expand and institutionalize Israeli control and sovereignty. Land and resources are transferred to Israeli control; settlements, outposts, and farm outposts expand; and the systems of law, planning, infrastructure, and funding establish a contiguous, permanent Israeli presence. The two processes are intertwined: dismantling Palestinian existence enables the expansion of Israeli presence and control, while that expansion entrenches and deepens Palestinian displacement and fracturing. The elimination of Palestinian existence is therefore bound up with the consolidation of a regime order based on Jewish supremacy.

This project is not new. It relies on mechanisms Israel has developed and employed for decades. Since the current Israeli government took office at the end of 2022, however, and even more so since October 2023, it has accelerated and intensified. Actions previously presented as temporary, exceptional, or driven by security needs are now carried out on a broad scale and in a more direct and explicit manner. Powers, state funding, and political authority are handed to actors committed to expanding settlements, advancing annexation, and pushing Palestinians aside, while the alignment between state institutions, the military, the settlement movement, and settler militias has grown tighter and more overt. Bezalel Smotrich's Decisive Plan is a clear political and operational articulation of the logic of elimination, and in recent years, central elements of it have found expression in official policy and actions on the ground.

All this is unfolding amid a profoundly altered political and social climate since October 2023. For almost three years, Israel has been committing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The mass killing, starvation, destruction, displacement, and assault on life-sustaining infrastructure and institutions are not occurring at the margins of the Israeli system. They are carried out by the military and state institutions and enjoy broad political and public support among Jewish Israelis. The normalization of the killing and colossal destruction Israel is inflicting on the Gaza Strip has dramatically expanded what the public sees as legitimate violence against Palestinians generally, and their dehumanization is

one of the conditions that enable the expansion of this violence and its open use by the government and the military.

This transformation is evident in the West Bank as well, and in the practices that Israel employs there: airstrikes, widespread destruction of residential areas and infrastructure, the loosening of the open-fire policy, mass displacement, and the use of military force on a scale once considered exceptional. The application of military practices from Gaza in the West Bank illustrates the shift in the limits of force Israel is prepared to use against Palestinians. In Gaza, the logic of elimination has assumed a genocidal form; in the West Bank, it is realized through an integrated mechanism of dispossession, ethnic cleansing, violence, control of movement and the economy, and the destruction of social and political life. The genocide in Gaza and the elimination project in the West Bank are different manifestations of the same regime project, directed against Palestinians' ability to exist as a people.

This regime, and the acts through which the elimination project is advanced, also have clear legal ramifications. The Israeli regime in the West Bank is an apartheid regime based on the systematic domination and oppression of Palestinians and on the entrenchment of Jewish supremacy through the allocation of rights, protections, resources, and political power. International law prohibits apartheid. Inhuman acts committed within such a regime and for the purpose of maintaining it may constitute the crime of apartheid and other international crimes. Meanwhile, the law of occupation, which forms part of international humanitarian law, continues to apply in the West Bank, while military control is effectively used to consolidate permanent Israeli control, expand settlements, advance annexation, and violate Palestinians' right to self-determination. In its July 2024 advisory opinion, the International Court of Justice held that Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful and that it must end it as soon as possible. These legal frameworks complement one another and address different layers of the same regime reality. The elimination project is not a discrete legal category, but international law does identify and prohibit its central components, including apartheid, annexation, settlements, forcible transfer, persecution, and the systematic denial of fundamental rights. Some of the practices through which the project is implemented may also constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The reality described here leads to a clear moral and political conclusion: the systematic and

violent oppression Israel inflicts on Palestinians in the West Bank cannot be ended through more effective enforcement against particularly violent settlers, the removal of certain checkpoints, a partial construction freeze, or isolated policy changes. While significant in preventing specific crimes, such steps leave intact the structure that produces violence, dispossession, and oppression. The practices described in this report are not aberrations but integral to how the regime operates. They stem from the way the regime organizes the distribution of land, rights, protections, and political power between Israelis and Palestinians. Ending them requires changing the structure that produces them.

Protecting human rights requires ending the Israeli apartheid regime, not fixing it. Sporadic fixes cannot turn a settler-colonial project based on dispossession into a system that respects human rights. Palestinians' rights can never be guaranteed within a system that works to deny them political power, control their land, and dismantle their ability to exist as a collective. A regime based on Jewish supremacy, apartheid, and dispossession is illegitimate. It cannot be accepted or normalized, nor is it enough merely to reduce some of the violence and dispossession it produces.

For years, the international community has watched events as they unfold in the West Bank while continuing to treat them as a series of separate acts and incidents: settlement expansion, settler violence, demolitions, roadblocks, land expropriation, or the killing of Palestinians. Isolated condemnations and repeated calls to show restraint, avoid unilateral steps, or return to the political process enable the international community to evade fulfilling its obligations to protect people living under a regime that systematically attacks them and their rights, while giving Israel time and latitude to continue advancing its elimination project with impunity. Israel's immunity from international accountability, together with the political, military, economic, and diplomatic support it receives, provides it with the resources, legitimacy, and freedom to continue committing crimes against Palestinians without being held to account.

States and international institutions have a moral and legal obligation to do everything in their power and use all means at their disposal under international law to prevent Israel from continuing its crimes and to protect Palestinians from them.

Any just future political order must be grounded in recognition of Palestinians as a people with collective rights and the right to shape their own future, not as a population to be

managed by Israel or international actors. Palestinians' political status and the conditions of their lives cannot continue to be determined through coercion, military control, or arrangements that preserve existing relations of domination. Palestinians' rights to self-determination and to live collectively as a people are the foundation for any just future.

B'Tselem works for a future of freedom, justice, equality, and democracy for all people living between the river and the sea. Such a future requires ending the apartheid regime and military rule over Palestinians, and guaranteeing individual and collective rights, equal political participation, and a meaningful opportunity for everyone to shape their future. Ending the crimes and violations is a necessary condition, but it is equally necessary to recognize injustices, ensure accountability for them, and reckon with the continuing consequences of past and present dispossession and displacement, violence, and social and political destruction. All this requires a fundamental transformation of the existing regime structure and the construction of a system grounded in the equal worth of every human being and guaranteeing the right to live in freedom, equality, safety, and dignity.

Supported primarily by funding from foreign states. The names of the foreign states from which the donations were received are on the Registrar's website.