

Palestinians defend their olive trees as settler assaults escalate

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-18 02:28

AMMAN: Palestinians are bracing themselves for settler assaults on their land as the olive harvesting season kicks into high gear.

Palestinian farmers, civil society, local and international volunteers, as well as video have documented Israeli settlers uprooting olive trees, stealing olive crops, and starting fires on nearby land.

Anees Sweidan, deputy mayor of Nablus, told Arab News that every year at this time settlers invaded the governorate of Nablus and stole ripe olives, cut down trees and burned them.

Sweidan said that Nablus municipality had paved parts of the road connecting areas to the east of the city with the village of Assera Al-Shamieh to help Palestinians protect their land from settler assaults.

He called on the international community to provide protection to Palestinians from settlers who attacked them and also to the international volunteers who came to help during the short but intense harvest season.

The biggest danger was always on Palestinian land closest to illegal Israeli settlements, he added.

Atallah Hanna, bishop of Sebastia, said God did not justify the injustice that was affecting people's holy places and even olive trees.

"Olive trees are a symbol of peace in Palestine. They are also a symbol of our heritage in this holy land," he told Arab News. "Jewish settlers might steal and burn, our Palestinian people will stand and we as Christians stand with justice and the case of justice of our Palestinian people."

Israeli media reported that Defense Minister Benny Gantz had ordered the army to act "systemically, aggressively and uncompromisingly – together with the Shin Bet security service and the police – against all forms of violence, against Palestinians, Jews and of course against security forces."

But Knesset member Sami Abu Shehadeh questioned the Israeli will as, he said, settler attacks against Palestinians were supported by the government and the army.

"If there was no political and military support for those racist individuals these attacks would not have continued all this period. This protection is a green light enabling the continuation and the escalation of these barbaric attacks by Jewish settlers," he told Arab News.

The National Bureau for Defending the Land and Resisting Settlements has

launched a “Protectors of the Land” campaign, while the Agricultural Relief Committee has launched its annual volunteer campaign with a slogan aimed at helping farmers harvest olives in areas threatened by settlement.

Palestinians plant around 10,000 olive trees in the West Bank each year, most of which are oil-producing varieties.

According to UN monitors, more than 4,000 olive trees and other tree crops were burned or removed by Israeli settlers in 2020.



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More Palestinians apply for Israeli work permits
In brazen attack by settlers, Palestinians see larger threat

[More Palestinians apply for Israeli](#)

work permits

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-18 02:23

GAZA CITY: Mahmoud al-Dakhni was one of the thousands of Palestinians gathered in front of the Chambers of Commerce headquarters in Gaza to apply for work permits inside Israel.

They were of different age groups and backgrounds, including degree holders, and crowded outside the building in the hope of obtaining Israeli approval to apply for a permit that would allow them to pass through the Erez crossing and escape Gaza's deteriorating economic reality.

Since Hamas seized control of Gaza by force in 2007, Israel has imposed a siege that has caused Palestinians' economic conditions to suffer.

The situation worsened due to Israeli restrictions since the last war in May 2020.

Al-Dakhni said he had worked for a few days not exceeding the number of "fingers of the hand" since that war.

"Working in Israel is more profitable than in Gaza where the worker gets ILS300 (\$93.12) or more, while the wages of a worker in Gaza do not exceed ILS50 per day, and with longer and more miserable working hours," said the 33-year-old construction worker, who has six children.

To obtain a work permit Al-Dakhni, like others, resorted to opening a commercial registration with the Chamber of Commerce to prove he was a merchant, which is a condition for obtaining Israeli approval.

Al-Dakhni borrowed the amount he had paid for the commercial register. "Everyone does this," he explained. "Israel does not announce that these are work permits, but rather permits for merchants, but the truth is that those who obtain them use them to work in Israel."

Mahmoud Haniyeh and four of his friends resorted to the same approach, obtaining a commercial registration after sharing its costs. "We each paid ILS1,700 and we hope to compensate for it by working in Israel."

Haniyeh, 45, used to work as a tailor in the Erez industrial zone, before losing his job completely with the Hamas takeover of Gaza.

Haniyeh, who supports a family of eight, said he had to buy a car in instalments to work as a taxi driver to provide for his family's needs. But it became a burden on him due to the poor economic conditions of the majority of the population.

"I work on the car every day from six in the morning until the evening hours, and on many days what I get does not meet the basic needs of the family ... We only want our children to live a decent life."

Video clips of work permit seekers circulated on social media. They directed their anger at Fatah and Hamas and held them responsible for the crises afflicting Gaza.

One clip showed a man, who appeared to be in his late thirties, saying he graduated from university in 2009 while his wife had graduated this year and that they had no hope of getting a job.

“University degrees have become useless in light of the division, especially if you are not affiliated with a political faction,” he said in the clip.

Egypt is currently working to consolidate the truce that it sponsored between Hamas and Israel that halted the 11-day war last May. But the Egyptian mediation has not yet resulted in bringing the two sides closer together.

Israeli public radio said the total number of permits granted to Palestinian workers from Gaza to work inside Israel was 7,000, after their number was about 5,000 workers and traders last August.

In 2019, Israel allowed Gaza residents to submit job applications for the first time, with the number of workers in Israel from Gaza standing about 120,000 before the second Intifada in 2000.

At the time, the labor of these workers contributed to about 20 percent of the Palestinian economy in Gaza, according to local data.

The Chamber of Commerce said it received about 10,447 applications – in one day – to obtain work permits in Israel and the West Bank.

The Ministry of Labor in Gaza held the “responsibility for the accumulation of unemployment in Gaza, which has reached unprecedented numbers, due to the continuation of the siege imposed for the 15th year in a row, and the policy of closing the crossings.”

Permit applicants must meet several criteria. They must be aged between 26-60, married, unemployed, and vaccinated against COVID-19.

More than 2 million people in Gaza suffer from poor economic conditions resulting from an Israeli blockade since 2006, which has caused a rise in poverty and unemployment rates.

According to a report from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics last August, the number of unemployed people in the Gaza Strip had reached 212,000, with an unemployment rate of 45 percent.

The head of the Gaza Labor Union, Sami Al-Amsi, said Israel had not yet allowed Gaza workers to work inside Israel and that all the permits issued were for merchants.

Al-Amsi believed that Israel’s issue of permits to merchants, and not as part of worker permits, did not obligate employers in Israel to show rights toward these workers.



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Thousands of Gazans apply for Israeli work permits
Israeli court ruling on major holy site angers Palestinians

[Shooting in Syria could mark new phase in Israeli campaign](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-18 02:17

JERUSALEM: The death of a former Syrian Druse lawmaker, allegedly by Israeli sniper fire, could mark a new phase in what Israel calls its war against Iranian entrenchment in neighboring Syria.

Syria's state-run news agency said that Midhat Saleh was fatally shot Saturday in Ein el-Tinneh, a village along the Israeli frontier in the Golan Heights where he ran a Syrian government office. Israeli media said Saleh had been assisting the Iranian military against Israel.

The Israeli military declined to comment, but if Saleh was indeed killed by Israel, it would mark the first time that Israeli snipers are known to have killed someone identified as an Iranian-linked target across the border. Israel has said it will not tolerate a permanent Iranian military presence in Syria and has acknowledged carrying out scores of airstrikes on alleged Iranian arms shipments and military targets in Syria in recent years.

Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war and later annexed the strategic territory, which overlooks northern Israel. Most of the world does not recognize the annexation, though the Trump administration declared the territory to be part of Israel.

Saleh was born in Majdal Shams, in the Israeli-controlled side of the Golan, and was jailed several times by Israel, most recently for 12 years until 1997. He later moved to Syria, was elected to parliament in 1998 and served as an adviser to the government on the Golan issue.

The small Druse community living in the Israeli-controlled side of the Golan generally has good relations with Israel. But many members still profess loyalty to Syria, in part because they have relatives on the other side of the border.

Samih Ayoub, a resident on the Israeli side of the Golan, told Israel's Army Radio station Saleh had "no connection" to Iran or to any militia. "He's just a quiet man who works in an office. They killed him next to his house," he said.

Saleh's brother, Yasser Saleh, a doctor in Damascus, said his brother also lived in the Syrian capital but visited the border area periodically, slept there and sometimes spoke with relatives across the frontier. He said his younger brother had survived an earlier assassination attempt in early 2011 and remained committed to ending Israel's control over the Golan Heights until the end. He said his brother was survived by a wife and two children, including a son named Golan.

While there was no official comment, Israeli military commentators – who are given high-level background briefings with top army brass – said Saleh was intimately involved in assisting the Iranians build up their capabilities along the Israeli front. Iran has sent thousands of forces to Syria to back the army of President Bashar Assad during the country's decade-long civil war.

"He answered directly to the Iranians," wrote Yossi Yehoshua, a military correspondent for Yediot Ahronot, Israel's largest paid daily newspaper.

Giora Eiland, a former Israeli national security adviser, told Army Radio that if Israel killed Saleh, it was meant to send a message to the Iranians and not connected to the past. "I assume this was not an act of revenge," he said. "We're not talking about a mass murderer."

Yoel Guzansky, a senior fellow and expert on Iran at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank, said it was not a sure

thing that Israel had even been involved. He said that Saleh was not an especially valuable target and also had tense relations with Iranian proxy Hezbollah and objected to the group's activities in the Golan.

But he said that if Israel did indeed kill Saleh through an unprecedented sniper attack, it sent a powerful message to Iran and Syria about their activities near the Israeli border.

"It says that we have many ways and many techniques," he said. "We're watching you."



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prisoners route to freedom

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-18 02:06

RABAT: Saleh has been languishing in Moroccan jails for 19 years on terrorism charges, but he hopes to be freed soon thanks to a de-radicalization program.

The former hard-line militant, today a bearded prisoner in his 50s, said he once held beliefs that justified violence.

"I believed Muslims had a duty to fight oppressive rulers who don't apply Islamic law, and to attack states that fight Muslims," he told AFP in the library of Kenitra Prison, near Rabat.

But those ideas were based on a literal reading of the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad "that I wasn't qualified to understand," he says.

Today, after passing through the North African kingdom's Moussalaha ("Reconciliation") program, he is hoping for a reprieve.

The program, launched in 2015 and led by Morocco's DGAPR prison service with several partner organizations, aims to help terror detainees who are willing to question their beliefs.

Saleh said his journey into militancy began after he emigrated in the 1990s to Italy, where he met an imam at a Turin mosque who belonged to Jamaa Islamiya, the Egyptian jihadist group that assassinated President Anwar Sadat in 1981.

In 2001, he left what he used to call "the country of the infidels" and moved with his family to Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

But the Sept. 11 attacks in the US forced him to change his plans.

With the US threatening to invade and topple the Taliban, he fled home to Morocco – and was promptly arrested.

He says he does not have blood on his hands, but he has been in detention ever since.

Morocco has had painful experiences with militancy at home and abroad.

In 2003, five suicide attacks killed 33 people and wounded scores more in the economic capital Casablanca.

Fifteen years later, two Scandinavian tourists were murdered by Daesh-linked militants during a hiking trip in the High Atlas mountains.

The security services have dismantled more than 2,000 extremist cells and made over 3,500 arrests linked to terrorism since 2002, according to official figures published in February.

Many cells busted in recent years have been linked to the Daesh group, which seized a swathe of territory in Syria and Iraq and proclaimed a "caliphate" there in 2014.

More than 1,500 Moroccan fighters are known to have traveled to the area over the past decade, a security source said.

But in 2015, Moroccan authorities launched Moussalaha as part of "a new approach" to detainees, said DGAPR official Moulay Idriss Agoulmam.

The program "includes monitoring the participants and helping those who express a need for guidance," he said.

It also includes studies on law and the economy, as well as a three-month psychological accompaniment.

It has so far reached 207 detainees, including eight women. Around 116 have received royal pardons and been freed, while 15 have had their terms reduced.

Mohamed Damir, another ex-detainee who had been sentenced to death in 2003 on terror charges, said many radicalized people "only realize they need to leave their extremist ideas once they find themselves alone" in a prison cell.

The 47-year-old said he reached that point after seven years of prison. That began a long process to convince the authorities to help out convicts in a similar situation.

In 2011, his sentence was commuted to 30 years in jail.

Then he was released in 2017 after taking part in the first round of Moussalaha.

Part of his re-education involved reading the works of philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire, some of whose ideas "are not far from the spirit of Islam."

"I discovered the concept of the social contract, which allows everyone to live in peace, as we are obviously all different," he said.

After leaving prison, Damir joined an Islamic scholars' association in the town of Mohammadia that oversees the religious aspect of Moussalaha.

Today, he is helping guide detainees through the program.

"It's not always easy," he said.

"Most of them don't know much about the Islamic religion," he said, adding that he uses religious texts to change their views.

"I try to persuade them that they will not earn God's favor by following the path (of violence)."



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Morocco breaks up Daesh-linked cell, arrests 5 Moroccan startup that wants to digitize small retail stores gets \$5m seed funding

[Date set for Iran nuclear talks](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-18 00:59

JEDDAH: Talks aimed at reviving the collapsed Iran nuclear deal will resume this week, two Iranian members of parliament said on Sunday.

After a private meeting with Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, MP Ahmad Alirezabeigui said “talks with the 4+1 Group will restart on Thursday in Brussels.” Another Iranian MP, Behrouz Mohebbi Najmabadi, said negotiations would resume “this week.”

The 4+1 Group consists of four UN Security Council permanent members – Britain, China, France and Russia – and Germany. They began negotiations with

Iran in Vienna in April over reviving the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the agreement with world powers to curb Iran's nuclear program in return for lifting economic sanctions.

That deal collapsed in 2018 when the US pulled out and President Donald Trump reimposed sanctions, and Iran responded by breaching the deal's restrictions on its enrichment of uranium.

Trump's successor Joe Biden is keen to revive the deal and the US is taking part indirectly in the Vienna talks. However, discussions have been suspended since June in a stalemate over who concedes first – Iran by complying with the agreement, or the US by lifting sanctions. US allies in the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, are also concerned that the agreement fails to address wider issues such as Iran's ballistic missiles and its malign regional activities.

EU diplomatic chief Josep Borrell said at the weekend he was ready to meet Iranian leaders. "The goal remains to resume negotiations in Vienna as quickly as possible," his spokesman said.



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Saudi FM: There should be 'quick suspension' by Iran of activities that violate nuclear deal EU envoy on nuclear talks meets Iran deputy minister in Tehran