



Israel is Committing Genocide Across Palestine: Active Genocide Alert Condemning Ongoing Violence in the West Bank

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The Lemkin Institute is horrified by the dire situation transpiring in the West Bank. During what has already been a devastating six months of conflict in Gaza, the Israeli military and far-right settlers have used the cover of war to conduct continuous attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank, often leading to death and forced displacement. These attacks have been underreported in the mainstream Western press, which has also failed to tie Israel Defense Force (IDF) and settler violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem to the genocide being committed in Gaza. These processes are all part of an overwhelming push on the part of Israeli authorities to oust Palestinians from their remaining ancestral lands. In other words, Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians across Palestine.

With international eyes on Gaza, Israeli military forces continue a campaign of genocide and unprecedented violence in the West Bank. The targeting of Palestinians has largely gone unchecked by media coverage or public diplomatic intervention. Before the events of 7 October and Israel's ensuing response, violence in the West Bank was already on pace to eclipse that of any year on record, with Israeli military forces killing roughly 200 Palestinians in the West Bank in the first nine months of 2023, more than in any year recorded since the UN began tracking annual Palestinian fatalities in 2005.

In the months following 7 October, state-sanctioned violence targeting Palestinians in the West Bank has been at an all-time high. On pace to shatter previous records, the past five months have been marked by thousands of arrests, hundreds of killings, and forced evictions of Palestinians, which have reached levels that can only be understood as a campaign seeking to rid whole sections of the West Bank of Palestinians. In only three months, from 7 October to 27 December 2023, the Israeli military and illegal settlers killed at least 300 Palestinians in the West Bank, including 76 children, dwarfing the previous high of 154 in all of 2022.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Israeli forces killed 509 Palestinians in total during 2023 in the West Bank, with over 350 deaths occurring from October 2023 to January 2024 alone.

Throughout 2023, at least 4,000 Palestinian civilians in the West Bank were forced from their homes, had their properties demolished, or were otherwise forcibly displaced.

Across Palestinian land in 2023, Israeli forces demolished or forced Palestinians to destroy over 1,100 structures. Of the more than 4,000 Palestinians forcibly displaced in 2023, 2,246 Palestinians, including 1,039 children, were displaced in this manner. Hundreds of these demolitions occurred in East Jerusalem. Palestinians are frequently forced or coerced to destroy their own property following continuous threats from Israeli authorities, with the demolitions undertaken in fear of retribution and arrest by Israeli forces.

Not only have regular Israeli soldiers conducted demolitions, but armed Israeli settlers have forced out whole communities from their ancestral homes. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has highlighted such evictions at the hands of settlers:

“Shortly after armed Israeli settlers threatened to kill them if they did not leave, 24 Palestinian households totaling 141 people, half of whom are children, were displaced from Khirbat Zanuta in the southern West Bank. On 28 October 2023, the families dismantled about 50 residential and animal structures and vacated the area with their 5,000 livestock.”

- UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Khirbat Zanuta is not an exception but the blueprint. Prior to its residents fleeing for their lives, the village was attacked by armed Israeli settlers on three occasions between 7 October and 28 October, when the Palestinian residents fled. Forcing people from their homes without cause, whether by expulsion or by other coercive acts, can amount to crimes against humanity, war crimes, or both. These acts can also amount to genocide if the intent is to destroy an identity in whole or in part.

For years, Israel has undertaken an explicit policy to “Judaize” East Jerusalem by evicting long-time Palestinian residents and placing Jewish settlers in their homes. Since 7 October, this effort has been rejuvenated by the far-right settler government. The state-led effort, supported by Netanyahu’s administration, seeks to establish Jewish-only communities *within* existing Palestinian neighborhoods such as Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, and the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. According to the Israeli investigative newspaper Haaretz, the construction of Jewish-only neighborhoods would include the redeployment of armored vehicles, access roads (often only accessible to Jewish residents/settlers), facial recognition technology, and a perimeter fence.

Forced demolition and evictions in East Jerusalem reached unprecedented levels in 2023. Last year alone, Israeli forces demolished or forced Palestinian owners to demolish 220 structures, forcibly displacing 597 Palestinians. Both numbers are the highest on record since the recording of such numbers began in 2009.

2023 was also a year that saw the most violent and destructive Israeli raids in cities, towns, and refugee camps in the West Bank, namely Jenin, Nur Shams, and Tulkarem since 2009. From 2009 to 2022, Israeli forces destroyed 27 structures during military operations in the West Bank, resulting in the displacement of 86 Palestinians. This past year saw one of the most dramatic spikes in IDF incursions into the West Bank. During *solely* military operations in 2023, Israeli forces demolished 222 structures. The destruction caused by the IDF during incursions into the West Bank led to the forcible displacement of 921 Palestinians, accounting for nearly a quarter of all those displaced in 2023. The number of structures destroyed does not account for roads, wastewater facilities, and urban infrastructure destroyed by Israeli military vehicles, such as that seen in Jenin.

Forced evictions, home demolitions, and the destruction of homes and businesses during military operations are tangible results of Israeli policy that show little to no regard for the lives and well-being of Palestinians in the West Bank. The visible arm of the Israeli state is ever present in the West Bank from its array of checkpoints strategically placed to complicate the movement of Palestinians throughout the West Bank, its defense of illegal settlements, and the consistent raids by the Israeli military into towns, villages, and refugee camps throughout the West Bank. However, violence wrought against Palestinians does not stop with the Israeli military; illegal Israeli settlers in the West Bank have been the vanguard for forcibly displacing entire Palestinian villages and towns.

Of the thousands of Palestinians displaced in 2023, Israeli settler violence is directly responsible for the forced evictions and displacement of 1,539 Palestinians. Most Palestinians who left their homes, many of which had been in their families for generations, did so due to increased settler violence and shrinking land to graze animals. Those forced from their homes in 2023 due to settler violence are nearly double that of the number in 2022 when 774 Palestinians were forced from their homes by settler violence.

Further indicative of a connection between Israel's genocide in Gaza and its aims in the West Bank is the fact that the bulk of settler violence targeting Palestinians has come *after* 7 October. Emboldened by Israel's eliminationist approach to its war on Gaza, Israeli settlers have evicted over 1,200 Palestinians from their homes since 7 October alone. This number accounts for 81 percent of all those forcibly removed from their homes by settler violence. More often than not, settlers are backed directly by the Israeli military. At best, the Israeli military is conveniently absent when settler violence occurs and is often unwilling or unable to search for and bring

perpetrators to justice. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 14 Palestinian communities were depopulated entirely by Israeli military or settler forces, with the Israeli army demolishing the remaining structures.

In addition to forced displacement and killing, Israel has also used administrative detention to threaten the collective life of Palestinians and force them to leave. This form of harassment and criminalization of an entire population rarely breaks into the international news. Administrative detention is one of the more controversial aspects of Israeli occupation in the West Bank. The law supporting administrative detentions is a holdover law from the time of the British Mandate in Palestine; it allows Israeli military forces to detain any Palestinian for six months to a year without charge, trial, or appeal. Living under military occupation in the West Bank, Palestinians have little recourse but to petition the Supreme Court for family members in administrative detention; this is often futile.

Israeli authorities use administrative detention in such a manner that in a 2012 European Parliament report, the practice was referred to as being used “principally to constrain Palestinian political activism.” Later, in 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) called administrative detention “an anathema in any democratic society that follows the rule of law.” At the time, in 2020, over 300 Palestinians were being held without charge in administrative detention.

According to the Palestinian Prisoners Society (PPS), an NGO that works with families of those detained, the number of Palestinians detained in administrative detention is nearly 3,500 people, including women and children. Palestinians held in Israeli jails rarely receive medical attention or adequate food and water. Dozens of released detainees have attested to rampant abuse and torture while detained, including sexual violence. To date, since 7 October, eight Palestinians have died in Israeli jails, likely at the hands of their captors or due to extreme neglect.

In addition to killing, forced displacement, and administrative detention, Israel is also pursuing acts of cultural genocide against Palestinians. For example, a report released by the UN in November 2023 calls for the protection of olive trees and Palestinian farmers, highlighting that olives in the West Bank have been going unharvested “due to unprecedented threats to olive farmers and their livelihoods.” This destruction is a continuation of Israel’s ongoing taking, uprooting, and burning of olive groves by settlers and Israeli authorities. Specifically, since 1976, Israeli authorities and settlers have uprooted 800,000 olive trees in the occupied West Bank.

While olives are the largest single agricultural product in the West Bank, sustaining Palestine's economy and individual livelihoods, these trees are also at the heart of Palestinian culture. Without having access to the trees, Palestinian farmers are deprived of a harvest season that is traditionally “a special and joyful time for Palestinians” with families and communities singing

and sharing food. Palestinians hold a deep-rooted connection with olive trees, many of which are ancient, as they connect Palestinians to their identity and homeland. Palestinian farmer Mahfodah Shtayye conveys this deep connection, explaining that “I felt like I was hugging my child... I raised the tree like my child.” Ultimately, the targeting of olive trees contributes to the cultural genocide of Palestinians as the trees “[lie] at the heart of Palestinian culture, history, its economy and identity.”

A slow, structural genocide targeting Palestinians in the West Bank has been in place for decades. It is now escalating against the backdrop of the genocide in Gaza. The Lemkin Institute has been consistent in labeling Israel's war on Gaza as genocidal and in pointing out the genocidal structural dynamics of Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands. It is misleading to separate the Israeli campaign in Gaza from its actions in the West Bank. The tactics employed by Israel in both locations are part of the same eliminationist, genocidal campaign.

The Lemkin Institute condemns all efforts to persecute, arrest, forcibly displace, and kill Palestinians. We further condemn the destruction of important symbols of Palestinian collective and transgenerational life, such as olive trees. We call on our fellow human rights organizations to recognize the policies implemented in Gaza as a larger, more intense version of the same policy in the West Bank: depopulating Palestinian towns and villages and replacing Palestinian localities with Jewish-only communities to create a permanent Jewish majority from the river to the sea. We call on the United States, the United Nations, and NGOs around the globe to join our recognition of Israeli efforts in the West Bank as genocidal. The Lemkin Institute calls on states and companies around the world to pressure Israel to engage in genuine peace negotiations, including by threat of sanctions and withdrawal of military aid. We remind everyone that states and private entities found to aid or abet actors perpetrating genocide may find themselves liable to prosecution for complicity under the Genocide Conventions.