



Members of Israeli Extremist Group Lehava March in Jerusalem and Engage in Violence Against Local Palestinians and Police Officers

Late last week, several hundred members of the far-right Israeli extremist group Lehava marched through the streets of Jerusalem, shouting hateful slogans such as “Death to Arabs” as they attacked local Palestinians and their homes. The lawless culprits used social media platforms like WhatsApp to organize the night of terror, urging participants to bring weapons and assault as many people as possible. The Lehava members vandalized cars and threw stones at the windows of Palestinian houses in neighborhoods throughout the city. Impartial observers condemn the inflammatory rhetoric and provocations used by the participating group members to incite violence against the city’s Palestinian residents and police officers alike. In response to and opposition to the extremists’ shameful behavior, human rights activists organized pro-peace demonstrations over this past weekend in Jerusalem. The protesters spoke out against the harmful effect of the continued illegal Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and also expressed the need for tolerance and social justice in the face of the disturbing developments of the preceding days.

Analysts point out that Lehava supporters appear to have been emboldened by the recent March 2021 Israeli election, which did not resolve the political stalemate that has existed for several years however it did see several extremist-racist politicians win seats in parliament. Adding to their brazenness is the fact that embattled and criminally-indicted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been blatantly courting these individuals in his ongoing efforts to form a new coalition government. These include figures from political parties who are bigoted and advocate for Jewish supremacy and the deportation of Palestinians – among other things. The extremist group Lehava itself espouses these same types of beliefs, as the organization strictly opposes societal assimilation and calls for the segregation of Jews and non-Jews. They have carried out heinous attacks in recent years at places like weddings and schools, and their representation within the Israeli political structure is troubling and serves as a major obstacle to the advancement of peace and coexistence.

Human rights groups and activists have also criticized the manner in which the inexplicable extremist violence is sometimes portrayed as retaliatory, instead of a clear aggressive provocation to initiate violence and stir animosity. On this note, peace advocacy organization IfNotNow lamented the often-used narrative that implies the behavior of the Israeli extremist group members was a response to attacks by Arabs as opposed to an obvious excuse to engage in violent activity. Additionally, the detrimental impact of the enduring Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories is commonly glossed over and ignored as a huge contributing factor to perpetuating injustice and hostility. Another issue which exacerbates this problem is the use of indiscriminate force against Palestinians, in comparison to their Israeli counterparts – even when the latter are taking part in reprehensible and instigative acts of violence. During the Israeli extremist group violence late last week, for example, reports emerged that security forces were considerably quicker to use far greater force against Palestinians than the Lehava extremists who were assaulting both civilians and police officers.

Ultimately, more than 100 Palestinians and 20 police officers were wounded as a result of the Israeli extremist attacks in Jerusalem, and social justice advocates have sharply denounced the incendiary actions of the Lehava members as a disgraceful attempt to provoke violence and discord.