



Israeli Forces Draw Criticism for a Wave of Violent Raids and the Killing of a Palestinian Human Rights Lawyer in the Illegally-Occupied West Bank

Israeli forces have been rebuked for a wave of violent raids in the illegally-occupied West Bank, including the killing of a Palestinian human rights lawyer. Muhammad Hassan Muhammad Assaf is one of many Palestinian civilians who have been shot dead during recent Israeli raids on Palestinian towns. Among some of the other victims are a 14-year-old boy and a blind mother of six. Assaf had just dropped his nephews off at school when he was shot in the chest by Israeli forces in the Palestinian city of Nablus. Heavy-handed raids and the killing of innocent civilians are not uncommon for Israeli security forces. Rights groups have repeatedly condemned Israel for cracking down on entire towns and villages to capture individual assailants, an incendiary action which only fuels further violence and results in the loss of innocent lives. This policy has been denounced as a form of collective punishment, which is illegal under international law. In light of the latest developments, there is growing concern regarding the potential for an escalation in violence similar to that which transpired in May of last year.

Last year during Ramadan, Israel launched an 11-day assault on the Gaza Strip. The war resulted in the deaths of at least 260 Palestinians, including 39 women and 67 children. 12 Israelis were also killed. With the assault came widespread destruction to an already besieged area. The outbreak of violence was a result of Israel's continued provocative and incendiary behavior, including attacks against worshipers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, plans to forcibly displace Palestinians from their generational homes to make way for illegal Israeli settlements, the systematic discrimination and denial of rights to Palestinians, and the illegal military occupation of Palestinian territory. The recent escalation of tensions in preceding weeks has many fearing another armed conflict.

Israeli soldiers have killed at least 16 Palestinians during this ongoing series of violent raids. International organizations have condemned both the attacks on Israel and the heavy-handed tactics using lethal and excessive force against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank. The death toll is likely to continue to rise as the raids continue. This also comes as the intersections of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the Jewish holiday of Passover grow nearer. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has granted security forces "full freedom" of operations, with such hostile language only serving to further exacerbate tensions. Also worrying is the fact that there have been multiple instances of vandalism of holy sites. A particular instance at the site believed to be the tomb of Joseph and the resting place of Sheikh Yousef Dawiqat, an 18th-century Muslim cleric, has been the flashpoint for much of the violence happening recently. It is here where Israeli forces fatally shot Palestinian human rights lawyer Muhammad Hassan Muhammad Assaf, an activist who documented and lobbied against illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land. The Palestinian Red Crescent reported that at least 31 people had been wounded in the Nablus raid – including ten by live fire, six by rubber-coated bullets, and 13 by tear gas.

The policies and practices of the Israeli security forces are simply not sustainable, and will only lead to further violence and the death of more innocent civilians. The attacks on Israeli citizens are to be condemned as well, but do not warrant the violent and destructive raids that Israeli forces have engaged in against broad segments of the Palestinian population in the illegally-occupied West Bank.