



## Unprecedented Levels of Israeli Settler Violence in the West Bank and the Harmful Absence of U.S. and International Action

The scale of Israeli settler violence in the occupied West Bank has reached a critical and unprecedented level in recent years. Last year, in 2025, saw the highest number of attacks on record, and 2026 is on track to exceed this yet again. Global humanitarian watchdog organizations have drawn attention to the alarming uptick since 2021 in particular – with 446 incidents being recorded that year compared to the whopping more than 1,800 documented in 2025. Since 2023, each year has seen a new record high of attacks as the annual number has rapidly increased from around 1,200 in 2023 to the aforementioned 1,800+ last year. During the first three months of 2026 alone, more than 1,600 attacks have been documented and as such the figure this year is certain to surpass 2025’s already unprecedented level. Equally as troubling as the continuously growing scale of settler violence is how these often occur with the complicity or direct participation of Israeli forces. The attacks are bolstered by an environment of impunity whereby documented incidents result in no criminal charges. Thus, rights groups have outlined the systematic manner in which these actions are enabled, supported, and even protected by Israeli state institutions – with the violence functioning as a means of seeking to forcibly displace and intimidate Palestinians in order to expand illegal settlements and territorial control. Exacerbating this highly concerning issue even further is the absence of U.S. and international punitive measures as well, which has fueled the massive uptick in violence and perpetrators’ sense of immunity from any form of accountability.

A primary driver of this escalating crisis is the increasingly blurred line between settler groups and the Israeli state apparatus. In recent years, thousands of illegal settlers have been integrated into military reserve units, leading to numerous documented cases where attacks on Palestinian civilians are carried out either with the active participation of the military or under its explicit protection. Furthermore, the institutionalization of unlawful land seizures has accelerated through administrative measures that streamline settlement expansion while imposing restrictive land registration procedures on Palestinians. This systematic cooperation, coupled with a pervasive climate of legal impunity where perpetrators rarely face investigation or prosecution, has fostered an environment that has allowed the scale of settler violence to grow at a never-before-seen rate.

The global community's response to the concerning phenomenon has been marked by a profound gap between rhetorical condemnation and enforceable action. While the United Nations and the International Court of Justice have repeatedly reaffirmed that the occupation and settlement activity are unlawful under international law, these declarations have not translated into a coordinated global enforcement mechanism. Many nations have issued statements expressing concern, yet the lack of concrete punitive measures has allowed the situation on the ground to deteriorate without significant consequences. This fragmentation has emboldened those taking part in and enabling the violence, signaling that the international legal order is unable or unwilling to impose meaningful consequences for the grave violations being committed.

Central to the absence of action is the United States' failure to hold Israel accountable for illegal settler violence, especially as it has escalated to unprecedented levels in recent years. While the Biden administration took the step of issuing sanctions against individual violent settlers and entities in early 2024, many observers argued that these measures were largely symbolic and "bandaged" a systemic problem without addressing the underlying Israeli state support for settlement expansion and settler violence as well as its legal, military, and financial cover for these actions. These efforts were then further undermined when the Trump administration rescinded all settler-related sanctions on its first day in office in 2025, which some analysts described as essentially "green-lighting" settler violence. Despite a major uptick in attacks – including at least nine Americans killed in the West Bank since 2022 without any perpetrators being held responsible – the U.S. has often declined to join UN Security Council condemnations of illegal settlement activity, instead opting to relay high levels of concern but failing to impose meaningful material consequences. For these reasons, U.S. inaction has been criticized for decades – a dynamic that many contend has directly contributed to the worsening of the problem.

Ultimately, the escalating Israeli settler violence in the West Bank serves as a sobering indictment of the current international order's inability to uphold its own legal standards. The mere fact that systematic state-enabled and sponsored violence has gone unpunished is a stark reminder of the pervasive culture of impunity that continues to undermine the rule of law and the prospects for peace. As long as the international community limits its response to verbal rebukes without imposing tangible consequences, it risks allowing for the circumstances whereby violence, intimidation, and forced displacement is wrongfully tolerated. When powerful states and global institutions fail to move beyond symbolic denunciation and towards actual concrete forms of accountability, they undermine their own moral standing and the principle of universal human rights.