Since 1967, over 150 settlements have been established throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, housing an estimated settler population of half a million. Some 100 ‘outposts’ or small satellite settlements also exist, built without prior Israeli authorization.

The transfer of an occupying power’s civilian population into a territory it occupies is prohibited under Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and their property has increased sharply over the last few years and threatens the livelihood and security of Palestinians living in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Physical Violence

Acts of violence carried out by settlers against Palestinians are on the rise. Violations typically include instances of physical violence, verbal harassment, and the deprivation of private property by setting fire to land and trees or cutting off access to land and water wells. Many incidents occur as part of what settlers call the “price tag” strategy, involving acts of violence against Palestinians in retaliation for perceived anti-settlement activity by the State of Israel.

- In 2011, OCHA recorded 411 settler incidents resulting in Palestinian casualties or damage to property.
- Settler violence has increased 32 percent since 2010.
- In 2011, three Palestinians were killed, and 183 others injured.
- One of those killed and at least 15 of those injured were Palestine refugees.

Impunity

Settler Violence exists in an environment of lawlessness and impunity. Israeli authorities persistently fail to prevent or reduce settler attacks on the ground, or to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. The Israeli police launch investigations only once a complaint is officially filed by the victim, despite there being bureaucratic and physical obstacles to Palestinians doing so [police stations are mostly located in settlements]. There is also a lack of confidence in the merits of pursuing justice through the Israeli police, given their poor track record in following-up on complaints.
UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA’s services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.

An Israeli NGO, Yesh Din, found that 91 percent of complaints filed by Palestinians after being attacked by settlers were closed on the grounds of “perpetrator unknown” or “lack of evidence.”

Al Baqa’a Bedouin community: Located in Oslo-designated Area C, an area over which Israel exerts full control, the Al Baqa’a refugee Bedouin community faced frequent harassment from neighbouring settlers, whilst at the same time the Israeli Civil Administration repeatedly verbally stated its intention to evict the community. One particular incident resulted in a child being seriously injured by a settler attack and two minors being detained by the Israeli police while the perpetrator of the injury was not investigated. The accumulative impact of this escalation in settler violence and impunity resulted in the entire community evacuating Al Baqa’a in July 2011. Half of the community has since returned to the land as a result of securing a court injunction against the demolition of their homes.

Land Rights

Settlements are an obstacle to Palestinian development within the West Bank, limiting the space available for housing, agriculture and infrastructure.

- Approximately 43 percent of the West Bank including East Jerusalem is allocated for Israeli settlements and off limits to Palestinian construction.
- 35 percent of East Jerusalem has been expropriated for Israeli settlements, with only 13 percent zoned for Palestinian construction, most of which is already built-up.
- The Barrier’s route cuts deep into the West Bank and once completed will bring 80 percent of the settler population into the Western, or “Israeli side” of the Barrier. If so, almost a tenth of the West Bank’s land mass will sit on the Israeli side of the Barrier.

Forced Displacement

Palestinians living in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are at grave risk of being forcibly displaced as a consequence of settler attacks, demolition of homes and livelihood structures and the loss of access to land, property and services.

- Over 60 percent of the Palestinian-owned structures demolished in 2011 were located in areas that have been allocated for the expansion of settlements.

1. OCHA- Israeli Settler Violence in the West Bank. November 2011
2. Ibid.
5. OCHA- Demolitions and Forced Displacement in the Occupied West Bank. January 2012
7. Ibid.
8. OCHA- Israeli Settler Violence in the West Bank. November 2011

UNRWA Programmatic Response

Monitoring and Reporting
- Monitor violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and systematically document abuses perpetrated against refugees.

Private and Public Advocacy
- Intervene with relevant authorities to remind them of their obligations under the relevant body of law;
- Raise awareness and mobilise international stakeholders on protection issues;
- Advocate an end to violations of international humanitarian and human rights law through UN Human Rights mechanisms.

Mitigation
- Ensure that refugees victim of the armed conflict or IHL abuses have access to basic psychosocial first aid and counselling services;
- Provide cash assistance and referral services to victims of home demolitions/ evictions and damaged property resulting from the conflict.

The Burin Cluster in the Nablus area: The majority of those living in Burin, ’Iraq Burin and Asira al Qibliya, just South of Nablus are refugees. The villages suffer from frequent attacks by settlers living in nearby Yitzhar and Bracha settlements. In 2011, over 70 incidents leading to casualties or property damage were attributed to settlers from Yitzhar settlement alone. The settlement was established in 1983 on 18 dunums of land belonging to the village of Asira al Qibliya. Today however an estimated 7500 dunums of land has become inaccessible to Palestinians from these villages without prior security coordination with the IDF. Although complaints have been raised, they rarely lead to indictments, contributing to a sense of injustice within the community and a lack of accountability by the duty bearers.