

Settlers attack Palestinian olive pickers in West Bank

By The Associated Press and Ha'aretz Service Saturday, October 19, 2002

Dozens of settlers prevented the residents of the West Bank villages of Akrabeh, Inabus near Nablus from picking olives. The settlers fired in the air and demanded that the Palestinians leave the area.

Several dozens of left-wing activists arrived in Inabus Saturday afternoon to help the Palestinian pick olives, and settlers again fired in the air. Security forces evacuated the left-wingers and the Palestinians from the area. There were no injuries in both incidents, police said.

Palestinians abandon village, citing attacks by settlers

Six Palestinian families set out Friday from the village of the West Bank village of Hirbat Yanun, leaving it completely abandoned.

Once home to 25 families, members of the Sobih clan said they were fleeing after four years of worsening attacks by Jewish settlers who have set up illegal outposts on nearby hilltops. The attacks have become increasingly frequent in recent months, they said.

Groups of masked Jewish settlers have charged into the village, coming at night with dogs and horses, stealing sheep, hurling stones through windows and beating the men with fists and rifle butts, Palestinian residents told the Associated Press.

An electricity generator has been scorched by fire, knocking out power to the village. Three large water tanks were tipped over and emptied, the residents said.

Palestinians complain bitterly of land lost over the past decades of Mideast conflict. Yanun is believed to the first time in recent years that Palestinians have abandoned an entire village due to the conflict.

Confrontations between Jewish settlers and Palestinians often fall into a murky legal area, with the IDF, the police and the military's civil administration in the territories all being involved to varying degrees.

An IDF spokesman, who did not want his name used, said soldiers try to prevent conflict between settlers and Palestinians, but that forces are primarily in the area to protect Israelis from attacks by Palestinian militants.

Spokesmen for the police and the civil administration could not be reached on Friday evening, the beginning of the Jewish sabbath. Phone calls to the Yesha Settler's Council, an umbrella group for the settlers, also went unanswered Friday.

The nearby Jewish settlement of Itamar, about 10 kilometers (six miles) to the west, was attacked by a Palestinian gunman on June 20. Five Israelis were killed and eight were injured before the gunman was shot dead.

The residents of Yanun have not been linked to that attack or other violence.

Yanun is an isolated valley hamlet flanked by two illegal outposts on nearby hilltops. The nearest settlement approved by the Israeli government is Itamar.



The Sobih family vacating their village of Hirbat Yanun on Friday.

(Photo: AP)

In Yanun, the men cried as they got into two cars to leave for the larger nearby village of Aqraba, where they believe there will be safety in numbers. They'll live with relatives there or move into rented apartments.

"Death would be easier than leaving," Kamal Sobih said, describing his attachment to the land where generations of his family have lived. "But there is no choice." He said he often spent nights keeping watch for attackers from his windows.

Ahmed Sobih, an elderly man, sat in the back seat of the one of the cars, an Arab head scarf covering his right eye. He said he lost sight in the eye after a beating from an Israeli settler.

He had been tending sheep on the hillside when a stranger approached. Sobih, mistaking the man for someone from a neighboring Arab village, went to shake hands with the man and offer him a cigarette but was beaten with his own walking stick, he said.

The village chief, Abdelatif Sobih, was the last to go. He said he's been attacked seven times and that his wife Raideh threatened to leave him if they didn't abandon the place.

"I kept urging the people not to leave, but they did, one by one," he said, crying. "They left me without a choice. I'm blaming my people as well (as the settlers) because they left me alone."