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PA claims Israeli planning to seize land for new settlements

Palestinian Authority legal adviser Mohammed Elias says lands of Qaryut village and southwestern area of Nablus are being targeted by a big settlement bloc in an attempt to divide the West Bank

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The Palestinian Authority's Foreign Ministry claims that Israel is planning to confiscate some 700 dunams, or some 170 acres, of land from the village of Qaryut, near the West Bank city of Nablus, as part of a plan to expand a bloc of settlements.

In a press release, the ministry condemned the plan.

"We have always warned of the seriousness of the Israeli colonial settlement plan that targets the southwestern area of Nablus and aims to establish a huge settlement bloc that will be connected to other settlement blocs," the press release said.

The Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) would not comment on the matter, while two leading Israeli settlement watchdog groups said they knew nothing of the plan.

However, Firas Alami, a lawyer from Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organization representing the Qaryut villagers, told The Media Line that since last week, they have been barred from about 700 dunams of village land.

The land is in Area B, which is under PA administrative control and where Palestinians do not need Israeli permits or coordination to enter.

"When I reached the Israeli authorities, they informed me that the land had been declared a closed military zone by the army for security reasons," Alami said.

Such actions rarely, if ever happen in Area B except in acute emergency situations.

“It’s a huge, dangerous step,” he said. “It’s an Israeli government step to slowly annex the land.”

Alami stressed that the land has olive trees and it is the beginning of the harvest season.

Bashar Qaryuti, an activist from the village, said it was mostly a show of power.

“What happened is not the confiscation of land, but the imposition of control,” he said. “We were shocked that we weren’t able to enter these lands.”

Qaryuti said that most of the land is situated between three existing settlements.

Mohammed Elias, a legal adviser to the PA, said that “the lands of Qaryut village and the southwestern area of Nablus are being targeted by a big settlement bloc named Shiloh for expansion. It is an attempt to divide the West Bank.”

Elias claimed that “Palestinian lands are being confiscated from citizens by force in some cases, and by military orders in other cases, to support Israel’s colonial plan and make it a reality. We are talking about very serious violations.”

Elias added that residents of the West Bank have previously turned to Israeli courts over land confiscations.

“In some cases, Palestinians have achieved legal progress. But when such cases happen, weeks later we hear about a new Israeli law that will prevent similar achievements,” he said.

“The Israeli judiciary is an occupation proxy. Popular resistance,” he said, “is what is left to the Palestinians to confront the Israeli settlement threat.”

Omar Abdullah, a senior official at the PA’s Foreign Ministry, said that “the danger now is that Israel is no longer an occupying power, but a colonial power that uses all of its resources to deport the indigenous people from their land in order to seize it.”

Abdullah called on the international community to note Israel’s activities in the West Bank.

“What Israel is doing is colonialism, using illegal procedures that are destroying any hope for a two-state solution,” he said, adding that the world should “limit” Israeli “violations” and that Israel should “work within the parameters of international agreements” with the PA.

“When the international community and the UN relinquish their political and legal responsibility, world order loses credibility,” he said.

Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians over the future of the West Bank have long been at a standstill, and Gad Shimron, an Israeli commentator and former Mossad agent, blames this, for the most part, on the Palestinians.

“They refuse to think of opening a channel of communication with the Israelis,” Shimron said.

“There is no doubt that the right-wing government (of Israel) is systematically expanding settlements, but the Palestinian refusal to even think of negotiations only plays to Bibi’s favor,” he said, using the nickname of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

“The Palestinian Authority has to come up with a realistic proposal,” he said.

“Remember what was offered (to the Palestinians) 11 years ago,” he said, referring to a peace plan proposed by then-prime minister Ehud Olmert. “Abu Mazen (Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas) didn’t even bother to reply.”

Shimron added that “crying and protesting” will bring the Palestinians nothing.

“They should initiate, come up with new ideas,” he said. “Crying constantly, as a policy, has failed completely.”

Article written by Dima Abumaria. Reprinted with permission from The Media Line

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Iran executes children in violation of rights law, says UN expert

General Assembly's human rights committee believes there are at least 90 child offenders currently on death row in the Islamic Republic, with at least 9 children executed over the last year

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Iran executed seven child offenders last year and two so far this year even though human rights law prohibits the death penalty for anyone under age 18, a UN independent human rights expert said Wednesday.

Javaid Rehman also told the UN General Assembly's human rights committee that he has "credible information" there are at least 90 child offenders currently on death row in Iran.

Rehman, the U.N. special investigator on human rights in Iran, expressed deep concern at the overall use of the death penalty in the Islamic Republic, saying its execution rate "remains one of the highest in the world" even after a drop from 507 in 2017 to 253 in 2018. So far in 2019, he said, "conservative estimates indicate that at least 173 executions have been carried out."

He welcomed an amendment to an Iranian anti-narcotics law in 2017 that led to the reduction in executions in 2018 but said "there is more work to be done." He also said he was encouraged by

the "enhanced dialogue" between Iranian authorities and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights "on the administration of justice and child offender executions."

As for the overall human rights situation in Iran over the last year, Rehman cited a number of "distressing factors," including a declining economic situation that he said was "worsened by the impact of sanctions, with serious consequences for the realization of economic and social rights."

The United States has been ratcheting up sanctions on Iran since President Donald Trump withdrew last year from Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

The U.S. administration contends Iran is not complying with the accord amid new questions about its activities raised by the UN atomic watchdog and is urging other countries to also step up pressure on Tehran.

Against that economic backdrop, Rehman said, those calling for respect of human rights "have been intimidated, harassed, arrested and detained."

"Between September 2018 and July 2019, at least eight prominent lawyers were arrested for defending political prisoners and human rights defenders, many of whom have received lengthy sentences," he said.

In addition, he said, protesters calling for better protection of labor rights at the Haft Tappeh sugar mill have been arrested on national security-related charges, including seven individuals recently sentenced to between six and 19 years in prison, though the head of the judiciary ordered a review of the sentences.

Rehman, a British-Pakistani professor of Islamic law, said journalists reporting on the Haft Tappeh protest and other labor rights issues have also been arrested and detained.

At least 32 people have been arrested since January 2018 for protesting compulsory veiling laws, the majority of them women who in many cases have faced harsher sentences than their male counterparts, he said. He said cultural workers and artists are "reportedly being subjected to arrest and detention for their work."

Rehman said ethnic and religious minorities are disproportionately represented in Iran's executions on national security-related charges and among its political prisoners.

"They are subject to arbitrary arrests and detention for their participation in a range of peaceful activities such as advocacy for the use of minority languages, for organizing or taking part in peaceful protests, and for affiliation with opposition parties," he said.

Only three religious minorities are recognized in Iran's constitution - Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, Rehman said. He urged that the constitution be amended to allow all religious minorities and those who don't hold any religious beliefs "to fully enjoy their rights."

