



# ERASING ANYTHING PALESTINIAN

ISRAEL'S ETHNIC CLEANSING OF WEST BANK  
BEDOUIN AND HERDING COMMUNITIES  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



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First published in 2026  
by Amnesty International Ltd  
Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street  
London WC1X 0DW, UK

Index: MDE 15/1102/2026  
Original language: English  
[amnesty.org](http://amnesty.org)



**Cover photo:** A Palestinian man looks at olive trees reportedly uprooted by Israeli soldiers using a bulldozer in the occupied West Bank village of Al-Mughayyir, north of Ramallah, 24 August 2025.  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“What is happening right now is [the] erasure of humans, trees and stones, and anything that is Palestinian, by settlers under the support of the military.”**

Muntasir al-Maliki, a resident of Kufr Malik

Palestinian Bedouins lived for generations in the occupied West Bank village of Khirbet Zanuta (Zanuta), sustaining themselves through herding, farming and dairy production. The village was designated as part of Area C under the 1995 Oslo II Accords, placing it under full Israeli military and administrative control. Today, Zanuta is being eaten away by Israeli outposts and settlements and destroyed by state-sponsored violence and terror.

Just 1km from Zanuta, Israeli settlers established an illegal outpost known as Meitarim Farm in 2021. The settlers soon began a sustained campaign of violent attacks and threats against Zanuta’s residents. They set fire to the villagers’ tents and classrooms, broke into their homes, beat them with rifles, threw stones at them, smashed their solar panels and windows, emptied their water tanks and pumped sewage onto their farmland.



  Ruins in Zanuta following the village’s destruction by settlers. Meitarim Farm is pictured in the background, on the overlooking hill. 1 September 2025.  
© Amnesty International

The story of Zanuta reflects the fate of dozens of Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities already displaced or at imminent risk of displacement in Area C. This report lays bare the scale and severity of the ethnic cleansing campaign targeting these communities, carried out in a context of apartheid and unlawful occupation and against the backdrop of an ongoing genocide in the occupied Gaza Strip.

The report also demonstrates - contrary to what too many in the international community suggest - that the campaign is not the product of “rogue” settlers, settlers’ organizations or “extremist” government ministers. In other words, settler violence is not an aberration but an integral part of an organized state policy.

The escalating violence in Zanuta followed decades of systematic discrimination by the Israeli authorities, including constant threats of home demolitions to force them to leave, a common practice adopted by Israel to enforce its system of apartheid. Zanuta’s residents repeatedly reported settler attacks to the Israeli police, seeking protection, but no action was ever taken.

When the settlers from Meitarim Farm again raided the village on 21 October 2023, this time accompanied by Israeli forces, and threatened to harm residents if they did not leave, the community knew they had no choice but to flee.

In a rare move, in July 2024 and February 2025, Israel’s Supreme Court ordered the police and military to facilitate the community’s return and protect residents from attacks. The Israeli police and military ignored both rulings. Every attempt by residents to return was met with continued settler violence and the acquiescence of Israeli forces. Digital evidence, interviews and satellite imagery from 30 March 2025 confirm the outcome: Zanuta no longer exists - it has been forcibly depopulated and extensively destroyed.

Meanwhile, the settlers received state backing to intensify their violent campaign. In April 2025, two Israeli ministers - Bezael Smotrich and Orit Strock - held an event at Meitarim Farm where they distributed 19 state-funded all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), cameras and night-vision equipment to settlers living in outposts in the Hebron area.

Finance Minister Bezael Smotrich explained why: **“The heroic and pioneering settlers who live here are doing Zionism, and they need security... We are here to build with them and to settle the land...”** - while praising settler land seizures and emphasizing the role of ATVs in taking over Palestinian grazing land.

The report demonstrates that the ethnic cleansing campaign in Area C is state-sanctioned, state-driven and state-implemented; it seeks to accelerate the Israeli government’s annexation agenda and settlement expansion through war crimes and crimes against humanity. As such, the report’s conclusions demand that the international community fully confront and name the Israeli state-driven project, and act decisively to prevent the destruction of Palestinian communities and the annexation of the West Bank.

## 1.1 AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL’S LEGAL ANALYSIS

Zanuta is one of 117 predominantly Bedouin and herding Palestinian communities in the occupied West Bank that have faced either full or partial displacement due to settler attacks and related access restrictions between January 2023 and April 2026, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In total, approximately 5,910 people were forced to leave their homes, leaving behind them vast, depopulated areas. Most of the affected communities lie in Area C, which comprises over 60% of the West Bank, and has been central to Israel’s territorial and demographic quest for domination for decades because of its natural resources, vital grazing and agricultural land and small Palestinian population.

In late December 2022, Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party formed Israel’s 37th government in coalition with two ultra nationalist and religious political parties. While state-supported settler violence has been a growing concern over the past three decades for Palestinian communities in the West Bank, there has been an unprecedented surge in the scale and intensity of attacks since then.

Tactics became particularly aggressive after 7 October 2023 when Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups attacked southern Israel, killing approximately 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and forcibly taking 251 others to the Gaza Strip where they were held as hostages and subjected to abuses. Amnesty International found that these acts constituted war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In response, Israel launched a military offensive on the occupied Gaza Strip of unparalleled magnitude, scale and duration and inflicted catastrophic levels of destruction, displacement and starvation on Gaza’s civilian population, committing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. While most global attention focused

on Gaza, Israel intensified its abusive policies and practices against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, with government officials openly encouraging and supporting settler attacks.

### 1.1.1 DISPLACEMENT AND DISPOSSESSION: WAR CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

Ideologically motivated Israeli settlers have terrorized Palestinian communities through repeated raids on their homes and villages, beatings, death threats demanding they leave, persistent harassment, the destruction of property and village infrastructure, cutting off access to water and electricity, and theft of their livestock and belongings. These practices deliberately intensified an already coercive environment aimed at forcibly displacing and dispossessing Palestinians, manifested in state policies of access restrictions, home demolitions and settlement expansion. Palestinians who have attempted to return have found their villages fenced off or destroyed, or have faced renewed settler attacks, harassment and intimidation, forcing them to flee again.

These settler attacks are the direct result of a state policy that integrated and enabled the settler movement's vision of "Greater Israel", an ideology that treats the area extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, including the entirety of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), as an integral part of Israel.

Senior Israeli officials in the 37th government have fully embraced this vision and explicitly encouraged, facilitated and condoned settler violence against Bedouin and herding communities as a deliberate tool of displacement with greater openness and force than their predecessors, as they pursued their goal of formally annexing the West Bank under Israeli law.

Since 1967, Israel has been enforcing its occupation through military orders and regulations. The situation in the OPT, including in Area C of the West Bank, is therefore primarily governed by international humanitarian law (including the rules of the law of occupation); and international human rights law. The same international norms apply to occupied East Jerusalem, illegally annexed by Israel since 1967, despite Israel's attempts to separate it from the rest of the West Bank through a regime of fragmentation and legal segregation.

In this report, Amnesty International presents conclusive evidence that these violations, perpetrated between January 2023 and December 2025, amount to the **war crime of unlawful deportation and transfer and the crime against humanity of forcible transfer or deportation**, committed as part of a policy to ethnically cleanse Area C of the occupied West Bank by forcibly displacing Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities and expanding illegal settlements at their expense.

Amnesty International uses the term ethnic cleansing in this report to describe a deliberate pattern of conduct aimed at permanently removing Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities from specific areas of the occupied West Bank, in particular Area C. While ethnic cleansing is not recognized as an independent crime under international law, Amnesty International uses the term in line with the UN Commission of Experts on Former Yugoslavia's definition, which describes it as "a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas."

While this report covers the period between December 2022 and December 2025, these egregious crimes are ongoing and are part and parcel of Israel's system of apartheid, as shown by Amnesty International's continuous documentation and reporting of the situation on the ground.

## 1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To reach these conclusions, Amnesty International first established Israel's intent to formalize the annexation of Area C under Israeli law and change its demographic composition, including through violations of international law, constituting war crimes and crimes against humanity. This involved extensive analysis of Israel's historical annexation-oriented policies, government agreements, official statements by cabinet ministers, proposed and adopted legislation, and governance changes in the occupied West Bank. The organization then assessed how these policies affected Palestinians from Bedouin and herding communities, focusing on three emblematic areas in Area C that had either faced settler-driven displacement or were at risk of such displacement between 2023 and 2025:

- Zanuta in the South Hebron Hills;

- Ein Samia in the central Jordan Valley; and
- Al-Farisiya, Ein al-Hilweh, and Makhoul, a cluster of small communities in the northern Jordan Valley.

The report also draws on field and desk research into events that occurred in 22 other Bedouin and herding communities.

In total, Amnesty International interviewed 64 individuals for this report, including 45 Palestinian women and men from 12 communities, who are either displaced or facing the risk of displacement, some of them multiple times. Amnesty International also interviewed 19 lawyers, foreign and Israeli activists monitoring settler violence, Palestinian officials, journalists and Israeli and Palestinian NGO representatives. The organization rigorously verified more than 420 videos and images, and reviewed government documents, court decisions, maps, satellite imagery, UN and civil society reports, and other open-source material.

On 13 May 2026, Amnesty International shared its findings with the Israeli ministries of national security, defence, justice and finance as well as with the Attorney General. By the time of publication, it had received a response only from the military's spokesperson's unit. Among other things, it claimed that Israeli forces respond to settler attacks against Palestinians and their property, detaining suspects, when necessary, until the arrival of the police. It also stated that it investigates cases where forces may have failed to comply with orders or failed to intervene to stop settler violence. Evidence documented and analysed by Amnesty International demonstrates a different reality from the claims purported by the military. A copy of the response is annexed to the report.

## 1.3 ISRAEL'S INTENT TO ANNEX AREA C AND REMOVE PALESTINIANS

Since Israel's 1967 occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem (which it illegally annexed), and the Gaza Strip, successive Israeli governments have advanced annexation plans that would allow the application of Israeli governmental power over the greatest amount of Palestinian territory while keeping minimal Palestinian presence.



 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli President Isaac Herzog and members of the new Israeli government pose for a photo at the president's house on 29 December 2022 in Jerusalem. © Amir Levy/Getty Images

The formation of the 37th Israeli government in December 2022 marked a significant shift in both the speed and scale towards formalizing annexation measures under Israeli law. Led by Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party in coalition with Itamar Ben-Gvir's Jewish Power and Bezalel Smotrich's Religious Zionism parties, the government made the expansion of formal annexation under Israeli law of other areas of the occupied West Bank beyond East Jerusalem an explicit policy objective.

It openly embraced the settler movement's vision of "Greater Israel" and intensified Judaization policies, which seek to maximize Jewish-Israeli control over land while restricting Palestinians to living in fragmented, densely populated enclaves to minimize their presence and curtail their access to areas of strategic importance. It also accelerated land confiscation primarily through state land declarations and expanded settlements and related infrastructure projects at an unprecedented pace. In doing so, it continued to violate core peremptory norms of international law, including the prohibition against annexation and establishing settlements in occupied territory. It also defied numerous UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the illegality of settlements adopted since 1967, as well as two advisory opinions by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), most recently the July 2024 opinion that found the occupation unlawful and ordered Israel to end its presence in the OPT and dismantle all settlements.

Israeli authorities also abolished provisions of the disengagement law that had led to the evacuation of four settlements and outposts in the northern West Bank nearly two decades earlier and retroactively legalized outposts that are unauthorized even under Israeli law, increasing state funding and logistical support and facilitating private firearm licensing to their residents. Crucially, the government actively enabled a campaign of unprecedented violence by settlers to forcibly displace Palestinians from Area C.

These priorities were formalized in the coalition agreements signed between Likud and both Jewish Power and Religious Zionism as well as the government's guiding principles. In complete violation of international law, these principles assert that the occupied West Bank is an integral part of the "Land of Israel", commit the government to "promote and develop settlement", and recognize "the Jewish people[s] exclusive and undisputed right over all areas of the Land of Israel", further entrenching Jewish Israeli domination of Palestinians.

The appointments of Itamar Ben-Gvir as national security minister with authority over the Border Police in the West Bank, and Bezalel Smotrich as finance minister and additional minister within the Ministry of Defense overseeing key units within the Israeli military responsible for implementing civil policies in the West Bank, placed prominent settlers and advocates of annexation at the centre of government decision-making.

Beyond formal agreements, public statements by senior officials – including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – reflect a coordinated and openly declared push towards annexation and Jewish demographic dominance in the West Bank, particularly in Area C.

For example, in February 2023, Prime Minister Netanyahu insisted that "construction and regulation in Judea and Samaria [the occupied West Bank] will continue according to the original planning and construction schedule, without any changes" and that there was "not, and will not be, any freeze." In September 2025, Bezalel Smotrich announced plans to annex 82% of the West Bank, stating that the top guideline should be "maximum land, minimum Arab population", in essence therefore to foster Jewish demographic superiority. Addressing both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, in September 2025, Itamar Ben-Gvir called for establishing Israeli "sovereignty" and encouraging the forcible transfer of Palestinians living there: "because this is our land, and because we need to tell the whole world: 'this is ours forever and ever'... Sovereignty, and also encouraging [Palestinian] voluntary immigration, which we should do also in Judea and Samaria."

### 1.3.1 EXPEDITED SETTLEMENT EXPANSION AND ANNEXATION MEASURES

Immediately after its formation, the government moved to implement the settler movement's vision, which includes formalizing annexation, settlement expansion and accelerated land grabs – as outlined in the coalition agreements. To this end, it rapidly shifted authority over civilian affairs in the occupied West Bank from military to civilian bodies. Crucially, these measures consolidated Bezalel Smotrich's power to make decisions affecting Palestinians in Area C. This violates international humanitarian law, which requires the occupying power to respect existing laws unless absolutely prevented from doing so.

**February 2023:** the Ministry of Defense established the Settlement Administration, a civilian body under Bezalel Smotrich responsible for all aspects of life in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The new body has authority to regularize outposts and enforce planning and construction laws for both Palestinian and Israeli

construction in Area C, which has led to a virtual halt of operations to dismantle structures built by settlers without official Israeli authorization.

**June 2023:** responsibility for settlement planning and approvals was formally transferred from the defence minister to Bezalel Smotrich in his capacity as additional minister. The decision facilitated unrestricted settlement construction in the West Bank by removing multiple layers of political and military oversight and cancelling the need for defence minister and prime minister approval. Following Donald Trump's election as US president in November 2024, settlement approval meetings – previously held at most quarterly – were convened weekly, accelerating approval rates.

**May 2024:** the West Bank Military Commander authorized the appointment of a civilian deputy for civil affairs within the Civil Administration. A close associate of Bezalel Smotrich was appointed, reporting not to the head of the Civil Administration but to Smotrich directly as head of the Settlement Administration.

**May 2025:** Israeli authorities announced the resumption of land registration in Area C, a measure effectively designed to benefit Israeli settlers by treating all unregistered land as state land under Israeli control unless Palestinians can meet almost insurmountable evidentiary requirements to prove ownership.

**February 2026:** Israeli authorities re-established a new land registration mechanism that transferred authority over mapping and land measurement in unregistered areas from the Civil Administration to the Ministry of Justice. By the end of that month, Israeli authorities had seized half of the unregistered land in Area C, which accounts for 58% of the area.

The security cabinet approved additional measures to entrench Israeli control over Palestinian land. These included: repealing a Jordanian-era law which had prevented non-Palestinians from purchasing land in the West Bank without permission from Palestinian authorities; and reviving a mechanism – through a body within the Civil Administration – that enables the Israeli state to purchase land directly from Palestinians without seeking additional approval. The government also authorized simplified settlement approval procedures.

## 1.3.2 FUNDING SETTLEMENT EXPANSION


Since it came to power, the government exponentially increased funding to implement the settler movement's agenda, using the Hamas-led attacks on 7 October 2023 to significantly escalate aggressive annexation-related measures and practices in the West Bank.

Substantial resources were channelled to the Settlement Division – the body mandated to plan and oversee the establishment and expansion of settlements – and major infrastructure projects; and specific settlements were designated as national priority areas under government financial aid programmes. Among the leading ministries that pumped money into the settlement enterprise were the ministries of settlement and national missions, headed by Orit Strock; defence; transportation; and agriculture.

For example, within the first three years of the government's rule, the Ministry of Settlement and National Missions' annual budget grew by 122%, reaching NIS 764 million (about USD 254.5 million) by 2026. In 2023, the government allocated NIS 3.5 billion (about USD 1.1 billion) to the Ministry of Transport to upgrade and develop roads for settler use in the West Bank over five years. An additional plan to strengthen and develop settlements and related infrastructure, with a budget allocation of NIS 2.75 billion (about USD 919 million), was approved in December 2025.

In addition, the government provided direct funding and equipment to unauthorized outposts. Peace Now, an Israeli organization, uncovered evidence that in 2023 the government provided 68 settler herding outposts and 33 outposts with NIS 28 million (about USD 8 million), which was used to purchase drones, vehicles, cameras, solar panels and electric gates. In July 2024, the Minister of Settlement and National Missions confirmed that her office had allocated NIS 75 million (about USD 23 million) to upgrade security infrastructure in outposts. Between April and July 2025, the government transferred at least 48 ATVs to unauthorized outposts along with night vision goggles, drones, communications equipment and generators.



 Still from a video that shows Israeli settlers erecting a fence around Zanuta. They are wearing sweatshirts bearing the logo of Hashomer Yosh, a state-supported settler organization, video dated 15 February 2024. ©Yehuda Shaul

Israeli authorities also directly funded settler organizations involved in dispossessing Palestinians. For example, HaShomer Yosh, which recruits volunteers to live or engage in activities in outposts, has received at least NIS 3 million (just over USD 1 million) in government funding since 2023 despite verified videos showing its members harassing and assaulting Palestinians from Bedouin and herding communities, damaging their property, and preventing displaced Palestinians from returning home.

### 1.3.3 SURGE IN SETTLEMENT CONSTRUCTION

**“Ma’ale Adumim is an integral part of our homeland and there will be many other Ma’ale Adumims in our homeland.”**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaking about the approval of 3,401 new housing units in Ma’ale Adumim, an Israeli settlement in the occupied West Bank housing already over 38,000 settlers, during a visit to the settlement on 11 September 2025.

The government’s policy changes triggered an unprecedented surge in settlement construction. While the annual average between 2012 and 2022 stood at 5,443 units promoted, it rose to approximately 16,928 units per year under the 37th government. In Area C, Israeli authorities declared 25,959 dunums (around 2,596 hectares) as state land between 2023 and 2025.

Between 2023 and 2025, the government promoted plans for the construction of 50,785 settlement housing units, according to Peace Now. In 2025 alone, the Higher Planning Council approved 27,941 units, the highest annual figure ever recorded.



©↑ General view of new buildings in the Jewish settlement of Aliya, south of Nablus in the West Bank. In May 2025, the Israeli government approved a sweeping expansion of Jewish settlements and resumed land registration in Area C of the occupied West Bank, accelerating annexation efforts. 19 May 2025  
© Nasser Ishtayeh/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

By contrast, Israel's consolidated policy to restrict Palestinian construction and development in the West Bank – and especially Area C – intensified; in 2023 and 2024 no Palestinian housing plans were approved in Area C and permits were issued for only nine housing units.

In addition, Israeli authorities demolished 3,407 Palestinian homes and other structures between January 2023 and April 2026, displacing 2,996 people.

They also took little action against Israeli outposts established in the West Bank by Israeli civilians without state authorization, even though they are considered illegal also under Israeli law. Indeed, they dismantled only six outposts, while dozens were established and subsequently legalized. This demonstrates that unauthorized settler construction is effectively encouraged and protected by the government.



← Olayan Olayan, who was born in the village of Battir in 1941, overlooks a valley in which a new Israeli settler outpost is built, as pictured from Battir, a UNESCO heritage village in the occupied West Bank south of Jerusalem, on 8 July 2024. © ZAIN JAAFAR/AFP via Getty Images

By the end of April 2026, Israeli settlers had established 363 outposts in the occupied West Bank, according to Peace Now. Of these, 212 (over 58%) were created under the 37th government, including some in Area B over which, according to the Oslo Accords, Palestinian authorities are supposed to have full administrative control. By comparison, 153 outposts were set up between 1996, when they began appearing, and 2023. They included scores of herding outposts, which are used by settlers to take over large areas of Palestinian land through grazing.

In addition, since January 2023, the Israeli authorities have retroactively legalized at least 39 outposts as settlements. Combined with government decisions to designate some settlement neighbourhoods as independent settlements, to re-establish four settlements and outposts in the northern West Bank that had been dismantled under the 2005 unilateral disengagement plan, and to declare entirely new settlements, the total number of new settlements declared by the government had reached 102 by 30 April 2026, according to Peace Now. This is by far the largest number of new settlements authorized by one government in Israel's history.

## 1.4 SETTLER VIOLENCE AGAINST PALESTINIANS AS STATE POLICY

**“For almost a year, I didn’t cross the highway [Allon Road]. They [settlers] used to harass me and other shepherds, and we’d try to avoid them, but then the army started showing up and protecting them, shooting in the air.”**

Ayman Suleiman, a Palestinian man displaced from Ein Samia

With full political, legal and financial state backing, under Israel's 37th government, settlers have intensified existing practices and adopted more aggressive tactics to displace Palestinians and seize their land. This has led to record levels of displacement, killings and injuries, property destruction and unlawful land appropriation.

Settlers use three main tactics to forcibly displace Palestinian communities:

- attacks on homes, villages and property;
- persistent harassment, threats and physical assaults; and
- systematic targeting of livelihoods by restricting access to grazing land and water sources, stealing or killing livestock, and destroying agricultural fields and crops.

Israeli authorities actively facilitate such attacks by arming settlers and allowing the army and police to support or participate in attacks. In several cases documented by Amnesty International, Palestinians who reported settler violence were themselves interrogated, fined or arrested.


Following Israel's offensive on the Gaza Strip in response to the Hamas-led attacks on 7 October 2023, the government loosened licensing criteria for issuing private firearms licences and formed hundreds of “rapid response” units across Israel and the occupied West Bank, arming civilians to respond in situations of “terrorism” and other emergencies. Thousands of additional weapons were distributed to newly formed “regional defence battalions”, largely staffed by settlers who had been drafted into military reserves. By January 2026, more than 240,000 Israeli citizens had received firearm licences, among them Israeli settlers.

In most incidents documented by Amnesty International, settlers were armed. Even when weapons were not used, their presence fundamentally altered the nature and severity of attacks Palestinians had faced for decades, enabling settlers to destroy Palestinian property, steal livestock, and terrorize Bedouin and herding communities with unprecedented intensity.

## 1.4.1 VIOLENT RAIDS AND PHYSICAL ATTACKS

Palestinians from herding and farming communities in Area C interviewed by Amnesty International said that settler attacks on their homes and community structures between early 2023 and late 2025 became more frequent, more intense and targeted their homes more often, leaving no place where they felt safe. They consistently reported that settlers targeted their livelihoods to force them to leave, often with the support of Israeli soldiers or representatives of settlement regional councils.



  Still from a video that shows settlers in Qaryut destroying a water basin used by Palestinians to irrigate crops, while Israeli forces stand by, 29 February 2024  
© Bashar Ma'amar/ Shane Bauer

Verified footage of some of these attacks shows settlers engaging in break-ins; vandalism of homes, vehicles, tents, schools, agricultural tools and tractors; destruction of water tanks, solar panels and food supplies; and arson of tents and homes. In several raids, settlers were accompanied by Israeli soldiers or settlers wearing military uniforms and directly resulted in the full or partial displacement of communities. Some videos show settlers harassing Palestinian shepherds, ramming flocks with vehicles, and stealing or attacking and in some cases killing their animals.

Several of the Palestinians interviewed, as well as four volunteers interviewed had personally experienced or witnessed physical violence by settlers. They said that settlers pushed or beat Palestinian men and at times children with their hands, sticks or rifle butts; threw stones or pointed guns and rifles at them; shot in the air to intimidate them; stabbed people with knives; and attempted to run them over with vehicles.

The attacks took place in grazing areas, in agricultural fields, inside communities and even in private homes, and were often accompanied by verbal insults, with settlers threatening to choke or shoot residents or take over their houses and explicitly ordering them to leave their communities. In addition, settlers regularly harassed Palestinians by filming them without their consent.

A shepherd from Shi'b al Butum in Masafer Yatta in the South Hebron Hills said that approximately three days after 7 October 2023, several armed and masked settlers arrived at his home and one threatened to kill his children if the family did not leave their home. The next day, the shepherd said, the same settler came back and pressed a rifle to his chest, kicked him in the stomach, and threatened to shoot him. This violence unfolded in the presence of his terrified daughters. On another day, he added, the same settler forced him to lie face down at gunpoint, and together with another settler covered his head with a blanket and threatened to kill him. They then destroyed the shepherd's water tanks and electricity lines, stole agricultural equipment, and smashed his wife's phone when she tried to film the attack.

According to OCHA, recorded Palestinian deaths at the hands of settlers rose to an annual average of eight between 2023 and 2025, compared with fewer than 1.7 per year over the preceding six years. Injuries more than tripled in the same period, including a marked increase in firearm-related injuries. More broadly, settlers carried out at least 4,575 attacks on Palestinian communities resulting in casualties and/or property damage in those three years.

## 1.4.2 DELIBERATE TARGETING OF LIVELIHOODS

Settlers also deliberately destroyed Palestinian farmland and livestock. Residents of Ein Samia, Makhoul and Zanuta said that settlers routinely herded their animals on Palestinian cultivated land, damaging crops and intentionally destroying agricultural fields. Video evidence of 10 incidents corroborates these accounts and additionally shows settlers building roads and fencing off entire areas to prevent Palestinians from farming. In a particularly brutal incident, on 17 July 2025, Israeli settlers shot and stabbed 180 to 200 sheep they had stolen in Hammamat al-Meyta, a small community in the northern Jordan Valley, killing at least 120 of the sheep.

As a result of settlement expansion and sustained settler violence, Palestinians' access to grazing areas in Area C has sharply diminished. Interviews and verified visual evidence show a sustained pattern in which settlers have exploited Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities' dependency on livestock to force their displacement. Meanwhile, instead of investigating settler abuses, Israeli authorities and forces have used actual or threatened livestock confiscation to prevent displaced residents from returning to their homes or grazing lands.

## 1.4.3 ROLE OF ISRAELI FORCES AND AUTHORITIES IN SETTLER VIOLENCE

For decades, Israeli authorities and forces have condoned, failed to prevent, facilitated or directly participated in settler violence against Palestinians. Under the 37th government, this support has reached new levels.

Despite its obligations as an occupying power to protect the lives and livelihoods of the occupied population, the Israeli army has either directly participated in settler attacks or deliberately failed to intervene, indicating a policy to allow such attacks and shield perpetrators from accountability.

Amnesty International documented 14 cases in which Israeli soldiers were present during or directly involved in violent attacks by settlers. Their actions ranged from standing by as Palestinians were being assaulted to facilitating or actively joining in acts of harassment, intimidation, destruction of property or physical violence against individuals. In some cases, soldiers arrived alongside settlers, suggesting prior coordination. They also expelled shepherds from grazing areas, threatened to shoot them or confiscate their animals, conducted violent searches and prevented activists from reaching scenes of settler violence, allowing attacks to continue. These actions contributed to Palestinian residents leaving their homes.



Still from a video that shows Yinon Levi (in white T-shirt), a settler subjected to sanctions by the UK and the EU, touring the village of Zanuta together with Israeli forces on 24 August 2024. He is pointing out structures he claimed Palestinian returnees had built without permits. ©Yehuda Shaul

After 7 October 2023, Israeli authorities issued thousands of settlers with firearms and uniforms, making it difficult for Palestinians to distinguish settlers from soldiers. This enabled settlers to exploit the authority associated with military attire to carry out abuses. Verified videos show that settlers who previously attacked Palestinians in civilian clothing were now doing so in uniform.

In Shi'b al-Butum in Masafer Yatta, for instance, residents reported that since September 2024 a settler from the nearby outpost Mitzpe Yair, armed with a gun and dressed in military uniform, had repeatedly entered the village to take photographs and vandalize property. Videos show a settler roaming the village, by day and night, damaging fences and gates. Although he appears armed with a rifle and in military-style clothing, he drives a civilian ATV commonly used by settlers.

State collusion with settler attacks includes arbitrary arrests and short-term detention of Palestinians, which increased sharply after 7 October 2023. Palestinians described arrests and detentions imposed for allegations such as “clashing with settlers”, based solely on settlers’ testimonies, even in cases where they said they had been the target of settler attacks, harassment or thefts, while the settlers were not investigated. Some were detained after arriving at police stations to file a complaint after having been attacked by settlers, only to be treated as suspects in the very assaults they reported.

Palestinians accused of grazing in prohibited areas, such as land designated by the Israeli authorities as “state land”, closed military zones, or land under the jurisdiction of settlement councils – all of which were designations used by Israel to unlawfully seize Palestinian lands after 1967 – were additionally subjected to heavy fines, sometimes forcing them to sell part of their livestock to pay them or pursue costly legal proceedings to appeal them.

## 1.4.4 IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST PALESTINIANS

Despite a wealth of publicly available videos and victims’ and eyewitness accounts, Israeli law enforcement officials have consistently failed to conduct effective investigations and hold perpetrators of settler violence to account. According to Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organization, in the cases it monitored between 2005 and 2025, around 94% of investigations into offences committed by Israeli civilians against Palestinians have ended without an indictment, and only 3% have led to partial or full convictions.

Most Palestinian survivors of attacks interviewed by Amnesty International said they no longer file complaints with the police because it is unlikely they will result in any action.

Measures taken by government officials have also entrenched impunity. In November 2023, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir instructed senior police officers in the West Bank to refrain from enforcing the law against extremist settlers and right-wing groups committing offences against Palestinians, according to media reports. A year later, in November 2024, Defense Minister Israel Katz announced his plan to halt using administrative detention orders against violent settlers – which have been used almost exclusively against Palestinians for decades – saying it sent a “clear message of strengthening and encouraging the settlements, which are at the forefront of the struggle against Palestinian terrorism.”

Even when settlers or settlers’ organizations have been placed under sanctions, including asset freezes and travel bans, by some foreign states, they have faced little or no repercussions in Israel, despite extensive documentation of the violence they have incited or carried out. Crucially, they have continued to engage in abuses against Palestinians.



 Palestinian activist Awda al-Hathaleen with his child in Umm al-Kheir. He was killed on 28 July 2025 by sanctioned Israeli settler Yinon Levi.  
© Courtesy of the family

In one emblematic case, Yinon Levi, founder of Meitarim Farm, was filmed shooting dead an unarmed Palestinian activist, Awda al-Hathaleen, in Umm al-Kheir on 28 July 2025. Israeli authorities briefly arrested Yinon Levi on suspicion of involuntary manslaughter, but released him the following morning and placed him under house arrest for just three days. Videos show him subsequently returning to Umm al-Kheir to harass Palestinian residents and preparing the ground for a new unauthorized outpost. At the time of writing, Yinon Levi is yet to be indicted for the killing of Awda al-Hathaleen, even though prosecutors expressed their intention to do so in February 2026. Despite video materials showing him committing abuses against residents of Umm al-Kheir, Zanuta and other communities, no investigation has been opened. This reflects a broader pattern where settlers who establish unauthorized outposts face no accountability.

In the few cases where courts offered partial redress – such as ordering that displaced Palestinians be allowed to return home, as in the case of the Supreme Court’s decisions on Zanuta, or granting restraint orders against individual settlers – the Israeli police and army have consistently ignored the rulings, leaving Palestinians with no prospects of justice.

## 1.4.5 GOVERNMENT POLICIES FACILITATING FORCED DISPLACEMENT OF PALESTINIANS

In addition to the increasing settler violence backed or condoned by the Israeli authorities, forced displacement of Palestinians is being facilitated by other Israeli government policies, including discriminatory zoning and building regulations, settlement expansion, demolitions and restrictions on access to land and water.

The community of Ein Samia, on the land of Kufr Malik in Area C, north-east of Ramallah, is a case in point. For generations the area of Ein Samia was an agricultural and herding hub relied upon by farmers and livestock owners from Kufr Malik and neighbouring villages, including Ein Samia’s Bedouin community. Over time, the area became increasingly constrained by Israeli discriminatory land appropriation measures, accompanied by the steady expansion of nearby Israeli settlements and outposts, including Kochav HaShahar settlement established less than 2km away in 1977. By April 2026, settlers had established at least 12 outposts around Kochav HaShahar, progressively surrounding Ein Samia and consolidating settler control over land and resources.

The Bedouin community, mainly shepherds, also faced decades of demolition orders under a discriminatory planning regime that made building permits virtually unattainable for Palestinians. Authorities imposed heavy

finer on herders for grazing on land designated by the Israeli authorities as “state lands” and threatened to confiscate residents’ sheep.

As outposts expanded and demolitions intensified, settler violence escalated. “Rahma” (name changed for security reasons), a Palestinian woman subsequently displaced from Ein Samia, told Amnesty International:

**“The settlers started coming day after day. They overturn the water tanks, harass the young men, and come both during the day and at night. We can’t breathe any more. We are never at ease, neither by night nor by day. I am an old woman – by God, I do not sleep. I stay sitting on a chair. If they come, they spare no one.”**

The violence and threats confined Palestinians to a shrinking fraction of their former grazing areas, forcing them to buy feed and water, reducing milk production and income, and leading to land degradation. Following sustained daily attacks, the community was driven out of Ein Samia on 22 May 2023. Attempts to return have been halted or deterred by settler attacks, arrests, the authorities’ demolition of Ein Samia’s school, and the destruction and disruption of water supply systems.

## 1.4.6 COMMUNITIES AT RISK

Many Palestinian communities are at critical risk of forced displacement.

In the northern Jordan Valley alone, at least 38 Palestinian herding communities – home to approximately 7,000 people – are threatened with displacement as Israel advances its annexation-related policies. The area constitutes around 75% of Tubas governorate and is overwhelmingly classified as Area C, with nearly 90% designated by Israeli authorities as state land, “closed military zones”, nature reserves and archaeological sites. Israeli authorities use these designations as grounds for issuing demolition orders against Palestinian communities and preventing Palestinian shepherds from herding. Since January 2023, Israel has declared more than 20,000 dunums (2,000 hectares) in the Jordan Valley as state land.

Settlement expansion further fragments Palestinian communities. Eight Israeli settlements and at least 19 outposts, together with expanding settler-only roads and infrastructure, confine Palestinians to shrinking enclaves and expose them to intensified settler violence and military harassment.

Palestinian communities at risk are all too aware of their possible fate. Ein al-Hilweh, a small herding community of around 50 people, faced escalating settler violence from late 2023, arrests and intimidation by Israeli forces, and an expanding presence of nearby outposts and settlements accompanied by fencing that restricted movement. In July and August 2025, Israeli forces demolished all community structures, effectively rendering the community members homeless.



← © Palestinian shepherd in Makhoul overlooking grazing land near the community. A structure built illegally by Israeli settlers is pictured in the background. © Amnesty International

Makhoul has faced similar displacement dynamics over a longer period. Once home to dozens of families, the community was reduced to four families following the demolition of all 58 structures in 2013 and further demolitions since. Now surrounded by military bases, settlements and outposts, residents describe constant intimidation. Since late 2023, settler violence has escalated sharply, targeting livestock through assaults on shepherds, arson attacks, animal theft, vehicles driven into herds and threats against children. The community has also faced repeated settler trespass, harassment and construction near homes, alongside systematic nighttime grazing by settlers that destroys crops. Residents say they live in fear that any short absence would lead to permanent land seizure.

## 1.5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International's research shows conclusively that, in the context of Israel's unlawful occupation and its imposition of a system of apartheid against all Palestinians, and against the backdrop of an ongoing genocide in Gaza, Israeli authorities are committing serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in pursuit of a policy of ethnic cleansing in Area C of the occupied West Bank. This policy is implemented through the forcible displacement of Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities, acts that amount to the war crime of unlawful deportation and transfer, and the crime against humanity of forcible transfer or deportation, as well as the creation and expansion of settlements, which amount to the war crime of unlawful transfer.

In September 2024, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution demanding that Israel end its unlawful presence in the OPT within 12 months, in compliance with the ICJ's historic opinion outlining third states' obligations arising from Israel's unlawful occupation of Palestinian territory. It urged states not to render aid or assistance to Israel's unlawful presence in any diplomatic, political, legal, military, economic, commercial and financial dealings with Israel. Among other measures, it called for targeted sanctions against individuals and entities engaged in maintaining the occupation, including in relation to settler violence, an end to imports from Israeli settlements and a halt to arms transfers.

Most states have failed to take effective actions so that no aid or assistance is rendered towards Israel's unlawful presence in the OPT and to its illegal settlements; or to cooperate to end Israel's system of apartheid against Palestinians, and to ensure accountability for crimes under international law. Where action has been taken, it has been limited to sanctions against a small number of individual settlers known for attacking or inciting against Palestinians, some outposts they established, and several settler organizations engaged in funding, supporting or building outposts, or initiating legal cases to dispossess Palestinians.

By narrowing the focus to outposts and so-called "extremists", these measures have mischaracterized settler violence as an aberration, rather than confronting what it truly is: a central, state-sanctioned component of an ethnic cleansing campaign that serves to entrench Israel's system of apartheid against Palestinians, expand Israel's control over and fragmentation of Palestinian territory and ultimately to ensure its annexation – all of which is prohibited under international law and multiple resolutions adopted by the international community.

Among many recommendations made in this report, Amnesty International is calling on:

- **Third states** to ban trade, investment relations and any activities that contribute to, or are directly linked to Israel's unlawful occupation, system of apartheid and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, in addition to banning provision of funds or any other assistance to organizations that are integral to the settlement enterprise and apartheid system. In particular, the European Union must expedite the long overdue suspension of its association agreement with Israel and suspend visa-free access to all Israeli settlers living in the OPT. To prevent further depopulation of Area C from its Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities, states must ensure their diplomatic presence actively protects these communities' rights, including by visiting and supporting those displaced or at risk of displacement. They must use all available means at their disposal to pressure Israel to end its ethnic cleansing campaign and unlawful occupation and dismantle its system of apartheid against Palestinians.
- **Third states** to impose unilateral, targeted sanctions against senior Israeli officials directly implicated in Israel's ethnic cleansing campaign, including Benjamin Netanyahu, Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel Katz, Bezalel Smotrich and Orit Strock, and for their alleged responsibility for serious crimes under international law perpetrated against Palestinians in the West Bank including the forcible transfer of Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities, and for maintaining an unlawful occupation and the system and crime against humanity of apartheid. These measures should include travel bans, asset

freezes and other targeted financial restrictions, in line with states' obligations under international law. Targeted sanctions are a necessary and lawful response to persistent impunity and the failure of existing mechanisms to prevent ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

- **The Israeli authorities** to immediately stop the forcible transfer of Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities in Area C of the West Bank and anywhere else in the OPT, including by dismantling all Israeli settlements and outposts, and allowing displaced Palestinians to return to their homes. Pending their return, ensure that the humanitarian needs of all displaced civilians are met, including access to water, food, shelter and healthcare, in line with Israel's obligations as the occupying power, and provide reparation to all those whose property was unlawfully damaged, destroyed or confiscated. All Palestinian victims must receive full redress for the harm suffered, including for killings and serious injuries, and the perpetrators of these crimes must be held to account.

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# ERASING ANYTHING PALESTINIAN

## ISRAEL'S ETHNIC CLEANSING OF WEST BANK BEDOUIN AND HERDING COMMUNITIES EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since coming to power in December 2022, Israel's 37th government has accelerated measures to formalize the annexation of Area C of the occupied West Bank through a brutal ethnic cleansing campaign targeting Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities. In pursuing its goals, Israel committed the war crime of unlawful transfer and the crime against humanity of forcible transfer.

Between January 2023 and April 2026, around 5,910 Palestinians from 117 predominantly Bedouin and herding Palestinian communities were forcibly displaced due to state-backed, ideologically motivated settler terror, through repeated armed raids, beatings, threats, harassment, and systematic attacks on their livelihoods. These settlers were armed, funded, emboldened and shielded from accountability by the Israeli state.

Israeli authorities accelerated land grabs, fast-tracked settlement expansion, allowed outposts to multiply, increased funding and infrastructure for settlements and outposts and altered governance in Area C, further entrenching decades of apartheid and unlawful occupation.

Israel's ethnic cleansing campaign is not the product of "extremist" settlers or particular government ministers, but a sustained and deliberate state policy treating the West Bank as an integral part of Israel, aimed at displacing Palestinians while expanding Israeli control at their expense. To stop fuelling crimes under international law, states must impose targeted sanctions on senior Israeli officials most implicated in ethnic cleansing and ban trade, investment, arms transfers and activities that contribute to Israel's unlawful occupation.