Urgent Action Needed to Protect Palestinian Olive Harvest

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The UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory calls on all States and donors to take urgent action, beyond condemnations and statements, to press for the protection of Palestinian communities as the olive harvest season gets off to an ominous start.

At least 160 Israeli settler attacks related to the olive harvest have been recorded in the occupied West Bank in the first two weeks of October, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), often under the protection or with the participation of Israeli forces. Settlers continued the attacks over the past few days, including assaulting an international journalist while covering the harvest, and attacking European diplomatic representatives on a visit to a Palestinian community shortly after the start of the harvest season. Settlers attacking the olive harvest have used live ammunition and arson, destroyed olive trees and groves including ancient trees, damaged Palestinian property, and stolen harvested olives and agricultural equipment.

In addition to the attacks by Israeli forces and settlers, thousands of Palestinian farmers are unable to access their olive trees for the harvest due to severe Israeli movement restrictions that dramatically worsened over the past three years. In the meantime, illegally present settlers are allowed to access Palestinians' lands and harvest their crops.

"Palestinians often say that olive trees are symbolic of their existence as a group and their connection to the land. Attacks on the olive harvest can't be separated from the pervasive Israeli assault on Palestinians' existence as a group connected to this land," said Ajith Sunghay, Head of UN Human Rights – OPT. "This is yet another tool of displacement and dispossession, adding to the suffering of communities whose rights are under attack on a daily basis."

The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture estimates the losses of the Palestinian olive sector at USD 157 million since October 2023 in the West Bank in Gaza. The Ministry said 90% of Gaza's two million olive trees have been destroyed since October 2023. In the West Bank, 286,000 olive trees have been damaged through the end of September 2026 including 25,000 trees in 2023, 70,000 trees in 2024, 91,000 trees in 2025, and 100,000 trees in 2026 even before the start of this year's olive harvest season.

Sunghay reiterated the call to action issued ahead of the season by the Protection Cluster led by UN Human Rights – OPT — a network of over 100 international and national organizations that focuses on assessing and responding to the protection risks and needs of the most vulnerable Palestinians. The Protection Cluster urged member states to increase international and diplomatic field presence and engagement in high-risk communities, particularly during critical harvesting periods, complementing existing protective presence arrangements and focusing attention on locations facing recurrent violence and access restrictions.

Member states must exercise pressure on Israel to:

Ensure Palestinians' safe, timely, and meaningful access to their agricultural land.

Protect Palestinian farmers from violence, intimidation, and expulsion.

Protect agricultural land, crops, and productive assets.

Ensure access for humanitarian and emergency responders.

Strengthen accountability and provide legal remedies.

End settlement expansion and related measures that contribute to violence, dispossession, and displacement.

The Protection Cluster also called upon donors to provide timely, adequate, and flexible funding for protective presence, community-based protection, emergency preparedness, legal assistance and food security and livelihoods interventions, enabling partners to respond rapidly as access conditions and needs change.

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