



## World Council of Churches

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### Commission of the Churches on International Affairs World Council of Churches

UN Human Rights Council 28th Session

**Item 7: Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories**

**General Debate**

23 March 2015

To be delivered by **Anne-Marie Vuignier-James**

Thank you, Mr President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches would like to highlight today the persistent and acute problem of settler violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Violence by settlers is one of the most visible consequences of the continued creation and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements on territories that are not recognised as part of Israel. This violence can take the form of physical attacks, damage to property, as well as "price tag".

We would like to highlight the hateful attacks on religious sites that took place on 25<sup>th</sup> February, where Israeli settlers set fire to the Greek Orthodox Church monastery of Sion in East-Jerusalem and to a mosque in Jab'a village, spraying racist graffiti's on the walls.

During January alone around 5'600 olive trees were uprooted and vandalized, having a heavy consequence on Palestinian agriculture that depends by 25% on the olive oil industry. The response by the Israeli authorities to such attacks is to limit Palestinian access to areas around the "problematic" settlements to a few days a year, leading to a further negative impact on olive productivity as maintenance and replanting of trees cannot be done properly with the limited access.

Settler harassment and violence around Palestinian schools is also not uncommon. Cases of settlers attempting to break into school grounds, shooting tear gas towards children, writing hate graffiti on school walls and attacking children when walking to school are numerous and well documented. Such incidents are often reported as taking place with soldiers also present, without the latter intervening. In 2014, attacks on schools in general tripled compared to 2013, which is a very worrying trend.

Accompaniers from the World Council of Churches have been providing protective presence around 14 schools in 2014, but it is not possible to cover all schools and the protection of vulnerable population should not be left to civil society.

Settler violence deprives Palestinians of many of their basic rights such as the freedom of movement, the right to education, to adequate standard of living and even the right to life in some instances.

There is inadequate law enforcement as only 7.4% of investigation filed led to indictments of Israeli settlers suspected of attacking Palestinians and their property according to the Israeli NGO YeshDin<sup>1</sup>. This reinforces the culture of impunity for settlers and the sense of vulnerability and lack of security for Palestinians.

Therefore, Mr President, we call on:

1. The Government of Israel
  - a. to take all possible measures to prevent violent attacks by settlers
  - b. to make sure all attacks are investigated properly in an independent, thorough, impartial, prompt and non-discriminatory manner; with perpetrators prosecuted and victims granted effective remedy.
  - c. to facilitate the access of all children to school and ensure their safety during their commute
  - d. to make sure Palestinian farmers have safe and free access to their agricultural lands
2. The Human Rights Council and the international community to take firm steps to make sure that the Government of Israel complies with its obligations as occupier to ensure that protected persons are safeguarded against all acts of violence.<sup>2</sup>
3. To the European Union to continue its work on setting a blacklist of violent settlers who would be banned from entering the EU Member States.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics from Yesh Din with data collected between 2005-2014.

<sup>2</sup> IVth Geneva Convention, Art. 27.