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Date: 30 April 2013

Militant illegal settlement gangs of armed settlers accompanied by Israeli occupation army attacked villages Burin, Asira and Urif

Date of incidents: 30 April 2013

Place: Burin, Asira, Urif villages in Palestine

Witnesses: Communities of Burin, Asira, Urif, IWPS, ISM

Note: IWPS withholds contact information as a courtesy to those involved. However, we will do our best to furnish you with the information you may require, upon request.

Description of incidents:

Following yesterday's killing of a Jewish settler from the militant illegal Yitzhar settlement, gangs of armed settlers accompanied by Israeli occupation army repeatedly attacked villages Burin, Asira and Urif.

At 8:00 IWPS was notified that Zatarra junction was closed. The entrance to Yasuf was closed; no cars were allowed to enter or leave and no settlers were seen coming in. Burin reported 50 settlers attacking the town and setting fires on the land. Zatarra, Huwarra and the road to Awarta were closed by Israeli military. IWPS attempted to walk through Huwarra and were denied but were able to reach our destination through a back road. By this time the settlers were no longer present in the village, although the Israeli army stayed in Burin for most of the day.

Attacks began in the village of 'Urif. Around 50 settlers came into the town and threw stones at the windows of the boys high school. Three students were injured by broken glass before the army came with five trucks and 30 soldiers. At 11:15 the school was showered with tear gas. One student was hit in the head by a tear gas canister and most of the students were taken to hospital. The school closed and standoff continued between the settlers/army and the residents of 'Urif.

The settlers lit at least five fires around the school and the army prevented anyone from putting out the fires. The army shot tear gas and sound bombs for the next three hours, also pepper-spraying several residents. 20 people from 'Urif were hospitalized from the gas. Both the sound bombs and tear gas used was seemingly a new, more intense variety. Later in the afternoon, settlers threw Molotov cocktails at heavy machinery in 'Urif and continued to set fires to the land.

At 12:30 attacks began in 'Asira al-Qibliyah. As one local woman put it, the settlers “burned the mountain”. As we arrived in 'Asira, the air was thick with smoke and we could see one fire still burning in the fields closest to the settlement, though the settlers had already left and the soldiers had retreated to the nearby fields. A team of two people stayed on a roof to observe, while another team of two accompanied journalists around the area to show them the damage.

During this walk, the team observed many fires on the hillside close to Huwvara. The team also drove to the road near Awarta that was being used as an alternative route in order to bypass the closed Huwarra checkpoint. When we arrived, we saw hundreds of cars lined up at the intersection being held by 30 soldiers. Locals reported that the road had been closed for an hour and a half for cars and that people were only permitted to pass on foot. At this point, there were very few options for Palestinians to travel to their homes or to work and the most direct route from Nablus to Ramallah was completely impossible.

On the way back to 'Urif 40 settlers had entered 'Asira al-Qibliyah and were attacking the houses with stones. As we returned, we observed approximately 15 new fires set by the Yitzhar settlers. We ran into the fields, where many young men had gathered. Palestinian firefighters were present, trying desperately to put out the dry, burning fields. Nearly 25 settlers were at the top of the mountain and approximately 75 soldiers and Border Police were positioned throughout the fields.

As the settlers moved toward the nearby village of Madama, the soldiers and Border Police began to push, assaulting Palestinians and ordering them back to their houses. This situation was very tense and it seemed at any time the soldiers would attack fully and start arresting people. Several times during the skirmishes, soldiers cocked their guns and pointed them directly in the faces of Palestinians, including boys as young as 10. These altercations lasted approximately 45 minutes before the community noticed the settlers coming down the hill on the other side of the town.

Many people ran through the fields to attempt to protect the houses and people there. When we reached the opposite hill, there were nearly 20 settlers throwing large stones, some with slingshots. At the same time, soldiers shot many tear gas canisters, the majority of which were fired at head height and from an extremely close distance, in violation of Israeli army's own regulations which require tear gas to be fired at an arc. IWPS and ISM stood with the Palestinians for an hour.

After being questioned about why the soldiers were not removing the settlers from Asira's land, the soldiers stated: “We're trying, but we can't do anything.” In response to a request by IWPS to call the police (as Israeli settlers are subject to Israeli civil law), the soldier screamed that they were “Trying! But the police aren't here yet.” The settlers retreated to the settlement and the soldiers and Border Police violently pushed many Palestinians back toward 'Asira. The Palestinians refused to leave until they had succeeded in driving the

settlers out. One person was taken to hospital after being shot in the hand with a tear gas canister.

At 18:30, there was a demonstration of nearly 600 settlers at Zatarra junction. At 22:00 the army shot flares around the school in Burin and 20 police cars were observed driving into Yitzhar. The deceased settler's funeral has taken place and there is fear the settlers will focus on violent retaliation.

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