



FACT SHEET: Saving the Olive Harvest

Problem:

The olive harvest is central to the financial and cultural well-being of Palestinian farmers across the occupied West Bank, and is usually a time of celebration. But in West Bank villages such as Burin, especially in their agricultural lands near Israeli settlements, the annual harvest has been a victim of persistent Israeli settler aggression, including arson and physical assault.

The Israeli Army has not always lived up to its obligations under Israeli and international law to protect Palestinians. The Israeli High Court Decision of 2006 ruled that:

- ***“The proper way of protecting Palestinian farmers from harassment is for the respondents (the Israeli army) to provide proper security arrangements and to impose restrictions on those persons who carry out the unlawful acts.” [Ruling HCJ 9593/04 (2006)]***

The Israeli High Court later found that law enforcement afforded to Palestinians farmers was ***“insufficient and unacceptable,”*** and ordered the Army to correct the situation.

Fourteen years later, the Israeli Army continues to:

- Require permits from Palestinian olive farmers in the seam area to access their own property; access is typically limited to less than two weeks a year, which leaves the land vulnerable to settler attack for the rest of the year.
- Instead of protecting Palestinian farmer from settler violence, they declare a closed closed military zone and bar them from their lands. This past summer Palestinian firefighters were prevented from extinguishing fires set by extremist settlers.

As recently as 2019 the High Court ruled again that the Army needed to ***“allow [Palestinian farmers] unrestricted access”*** to their lands:

- **Ruling HCJ 6949/19 (2019):**
 - *“Due to an error... access of landowners from the village Qaryut to their land nearby during the olive harvest was limited. This was due to a mistake which caused representatives of the respondent who were present on site to believe the petitioners were required to coordinated access to the land in question”*
 - *“In the future the Civil Administration [COGAT] will publish all declarations of land closures for the purposes of the olive harvesting season on COGAT’s website. When preparing for the harvest in years to come, the orders should be available in advance on said website.”*

Palestinian farmers will be more at risk this year, as COVID-19 has prevented international protective presence groups from joining the harvest; Israeli groups will try to fill the gap.

Request:

Given the Israeli Army's repeated failure to comply with the Israeli High Court's rulings, constituents are asking their representatives to make two phone calls:

- **To the U.S. State Department:** inquire about the Israeli military's plans to protect West Bank Palestinians during this October's harvest, per the military's responsibility under Israeli and international law
- **To the Israeli Embassy:** request a copy of the military's plan to protect the olive harvest

Benefit:

As a champion of democracy and human rights, the United States must remind its allies to protect the most vulnerable and to respect the laws of the land. Requests of Israel by Congress to uphold the High Court's rulings will help safeguard the olive harvest in the West Bank. And as a close ally and a recipient of generous aid from the United States, Israel's behavior must comport with American standards so as to safeguard American interests and security.

Additional Resources:

- Video: [Hazards of harvesting under occupation - West Bank, Palestine 201](#), Jim Cohen from London, UK, as a visitor and volunteer for the last five years, has been helping Palestinian farmers on the West Bank with the October olive harvest.
- November 1, 2019, [Olive Groves in the West Bank Have Become a Battleground. That's Why Volunteers Come From Around the World to Help at Harvest Time](#) By Noor Ibrahim, Time Magazine
- 2019, [Reaping with sorrow: A summary of the 2019 Olive Harvest](#), Yesh Din • December, 2019, [Law Enforcement on Israeli Civilians in the West Bank](#), Yesh Din • September 18, 2020, [Fifty Trees Defaced, Uprooted in Suspected West Bank Hate Crime](#), Haaretz
- 2020, [State-Backed Settler Violence during COVID-19](#), B'Tselem
- September 15, 2020, "[Incriminating Minutes of an Israeli Knesset Panel on the West Bank](#)", By Amira Hass, Haaretz
- [Petition](#) by Friends of Madama and Burin
[Petition to the High Court of Justice : Enable Residents of Qaryut to Harvest Their Olive Trees and Protect Them](#), Yesh-Din, 28.10.2019
- [Fifty Trees Defaced, Uprooted in Suspected West Bank Hate Crime](#), Haaretz, Sep18, 2020 • [2019 Olive Harvest – Interactive Project: Israeli Harm to Palestinian Farmers carried out by Soldiers and Settlers](#), B'tselem
- Video: [Spike in settler violence during pandemic: Palestinians and homes repeatedly attacked, March 2020](#), B'Tselem