

PUBLIC

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UA 315/06 Fear for safety

ISRAEL/OT Human rights defenders in the Occupied Territories

Human rights defenders working in the Occupied Territories are at risk of attack by Israeli settlers. Amnesty International is concerned at the latest such attack against those who seek through their presence to afford protection to Palestinians and to bear witness to the abuses perpetrated against them by Israeli settlers in the area.

On 18 November, Tove Johannsson, a 19-year old Swedish human rights defender, was assaulted by Israeli settlers as she accompanied Palestinian school children through an Israeli army checkpoint near the Tel Rumeida Israeli settlement in the West Bank city of Hebron.

The attack against Tove Johannsson, a volunteer with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), a solidarity group of peace activists, was witnessed and documented by several other international human rights defenders. They reported that the group was surrounded by up to 100 Israeli settlers who spat at them, kicked and shoved them, while Israeli soldiers standing at the checkpoint nearby took no action to prevent the attack.

Tove Johannsson was then hit in the face with a broken bottle by an Israeli settler, and sustained a broken cheekbone and a fracture near her eye. Her colleagues reported that as she fell to the ground, a group of settlers who were watching the attack clapped and cheered and some tried to take photos of themselves next to her bleeding face, giving the camera a 'thumbs-up' sign.

According to the ISM, one of the human rights defenders who witnessed the attack identified three of the assailants to the police but, after detaining them briefly, police released the three settlers, and threatened to arrest the remaining human rights activists if they did not leave the area immediately. Tove Johannsson filed a complaint with the Israeli police and her colleagues gave witness statements, but none of the assailants are known to have been arrested. On 21 November, the Swedish Foreign Ministry expressed concern over the assault.

This latest attack is one of many perpetrated by Israeli settlers against international human rights defenders in recent months and years, seemingly in an attempt to discourage and eliminate the presence of international witnesses, thereby depriving the local Palestinian population of this limited form of protection.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In August 2006, a Swedish and an Austrian national working for the international organization, the Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT), were attacked by Israeli settlers in the Southern Hebron Hills area as they accompanied Palestinian shepherds to their land near Israeli settlements. CPT members have worked in the Hebron area for several years accompanying farmers to their land and monitoring the conduct of Israeli settlers in the area, and have themselves been frequently attacked by Israeli settlers. Amnesty International delegates were also assaulted and beaten with wooden clubs by Israeli settlers in the Southern Hebron Hills area in October 2004, as they were investigating repeated attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian children from isolated villages on their way to and from school.

No investigations are known to have been carried out into the complaints lodged with the Israeli police by Amnesty International delegates and by dozens of International human rights defenders who have been attacked by Israeli settlers in recent years. The same is true for the complaints lodged by Palestinian victims

of settlers' attacks. The impunity enjoyed by the settlers responsible for such attacks has in turn encouraged further attacks.

A detailed study published earlier this year by the Israeli human rights group Yesh Din – Volunteers for Human Rights, which seeks to promote law enforcement in cases of settlers' violence, found that 90 percent of complaints filed with the Israeli police against Israeli settlers' attacks were closed without indictments being issued; and that in the rare cases when assailants were indicted and convicted for such attacks, the sentencing was not commensurate with the nature of the attacks (see: <http://www.yesh-din.org/site/index.php?page=report&lang=en>)

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Israeli authorities to remove Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories, which are illegal under international law.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Hebrew, or your own language:

- expressing concern that the recent attack on human rights defender Tove Johannsson appears to be part of a pattern of attacks and intimidation of human rights defenders working in the Occupied Territories;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that a thorough, independent and impartial investigation is promptly carried out into the attack on Tove Johannsson, and that those responsible for the attack are brought to justice;
- expressing concern that Israeli settlers continue to enjoy impunity for such attacks;
- calling for urgent and concrete measures to be put in place to halt attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and human rights defenders.

APPEALS TO:

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Salutation: Dear Minister

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Fax: +972 2 530 3367
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Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Israel/OT accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 January 2006.