

Before al-Aqsa Flood "Taufan": A Year of Israeli Occupation Crimes Against Palestinians

Special Report

November 12, 2023



PALESTINIAN CULTURAL ORGANIZATION - MALAYSIA
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Western leaders who visited “Tel Aviv” after the Al-Aqsa Flood operation on October 7th expressed complete support for the Israeli occupation, aligning with its narrative. Their positions were solely based on the immediate outcomes of the military and political attack, disregarding the deeper conflict history and the nature of the Israeli occupation. This operation, part of a longstanding pattern of brutal aggressions predominantly initiated by the Israeli occupation, embarrassed the Israeli occupation government and army led by Benjamin Netanyahu. The leaders' limited perspective resulted in unconditional support for the Israel occupation, even amidst its massacres and mass killings in the besieged Gaza Strip, with only occasional remarks urging more caution in targeting operations.

The responses of Western leaders visiting “Tel Aviv” after the Al-Aqsa Flood operation suggest a reduction of Israeli occupation’s actions to mere reactions, isolating the event from its historical context in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and framing it as an “unjustified and unethical” assault. This viewpoint deliberately separates the West Bank and Gaza, reinforcing the notion that Gaza is detached from the broader conflict, aligning with the Israeli occupation narrative. The Al-Aqsa Flood operation, sparked by the occupation's continuous violations of international decisions and provocative policies, unfolded in 2023 under Benjamin Netanyahu's government, resulting in over **180** Palestinian casualties in the West Bank.

The Israeli Extreme and Provocative Government

The current Israeli occupation government, led by Netanyahu since December 2022, is comprised of six right-wing parties, including Likud, Shas, Jewish Home, Yamina, Religious Zionism, and Jewish Power. Described by Western, Arab, and Israeli occupation media as the “most extreme in Israel's history,” this coalition marked the return of religious parties to the



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political scene. Even before becoming the Minister of National Security in Netanyahu's government, right-wing extremist Itamar Ben Gvir brandished a gun in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, amid clashes between Palestinians and Israeli occupation forces, accompanied by his supporters. Escalations in the West Bank, al-Quds, and Gaza have surged since the formation of Netanyahu's government, resulting in record numbers of Palestinian casualties, desecration of their sanctities, assaults on women, and the destruction of towns and wells.

In the first half of 2023 alone, Israeli occupation forces killed over **220** Palestinians, including around 40 children and **11** women. Human Rights Watch highlighted routine unlawful killings of Palestinian children by the Israeli occupation forces (IOF), demanding an end to the routine and illegal use of lethal force. Regarding Palestinian prisoners, Israeli occupation authorities issued over **2600** administrative detention orders since early 2023, with around **5200** Palestinian prisoners, including **36** women and about **170** children. In September 2023, Ben Gvir reduced family visits for some Palestinian prisoners from once a month to every two months, part of a series of punitive measures against prisoners. Additionally, in August 2023, the Israeli Minister of National Security called for arming more Israelis in response to Palestinian gunfire in the West Bank.

As for the Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich, who had his visits to Washington and Paris boycotted by American and French officials due to his racist and anti-Palestinian statements, he has actively supported settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, residing in the settlement of Kedumim in the northern West Bank. In a 2016 interview with the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, he stated, “If we show an iron fist, there won't be children throwing stones. Those who throw stones won't be here... Either shoot them, imprison them, or expel them.” In March 2023, Smotrich called for the “eradication” of the Palestinian town of Hawara following attacks by hundreds of settlers on the town on February 26, 2023, resulting in the killing of a Palestinian and



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the burning and destruction of dozens of Palestinian homes and cars. These attacks were followed by the killing of Israelis in a shooting on a car near the town, just days after the Israeli army killed **11** Palestinians during its raid on the city of Nablus in the northern West Bank. Smotrich also declared in Paris on February 19 that “there is no such thing as the Palestinian people,” a statement from a government official with an annulment character, unleashing a wave of hatred and deadly attacks.

The Israeli occupation incursions into the Al-Aqsa Mosque increased under the Netanyahu government, fueled by right-wing ministers and protected by the occupation forces. A Palestinian official report stated that around **41,000** Israeli settlers invaded Al-Aqsa Mosque from the beginning of the year until the end of September 2023, resulting in the arrest of **464** residents of al-Quds in the past three months, including **62** children and **32** women, along with **54** house arrest orders.

In the context of the Flag March, also known as the “Flag Dance,” a celebration marking the occupation of East Jerusalem, the Israeli occupation sought to claim ownership of the land, turning the march into a focal point of confrontation with Palestinians. Despite warnings from the resistance factions against “escalating tensions,” Netanyahu and his ministers insisted on holding the march in May last year. Netanyahu stated, “Despite the threats, I ordered the march to take place,” where participants often chant the slogan “Death to Arabs.” To secure the march, the Israeli occupation police deployed **3,200** officers and assaulted Palestinians in the Bab al-Amud area and the Old City. Ben Gvir, participating in the dance, shouted, “al-Quds is ours.”



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Settlements Expansion

Israel pledged at least twice to freeze settlements in Palestinian territories this year, but this period witnessed a record rise in illegal settlement activities. The current Israeli occupation government initiated the largest settlement operation since 2012. In the West Bank, Israeli occupation bulldozers work day and night, leading to a surge in illegal settlements. The government approved plans for **12,885** settlement units and published tenders for an additional **1,289** units, bringing the total to over **14,000**, according to Israeli Peace Now movement data.

The largest plans include **1,475** units in Ma’ale Adumim near Jerusalem, **1,081** units in Eili north of Ramallah, and **350** units in Alkana near Nablus. Reports indicate that **506,000** settlers are in the West Bank, and **230,000** in East Jerusalem. The displacement of these settlers is considered ethno-religious cleansing and is deemed impossible from a Jewish perspective. In international reactions, a statement by the “Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory” issued at the end of September stated that Israel has violated and continues to violate the Palestinians' right to self-determination through long-term occupation, settlement, and annexation since 1967. The committee emphasized that Israel's 56-year-long occupation is illegal under international law, and the consequences of these illegal actions warrant legal repercussions for Israel to end “unlawful international conduct.”

Another UN report stated that many Palestinians left their communities due to settler violence, calling on Israel to stop settlement activities and dismantle settlement outposts. In 2022, over **1,100** Palestinians were displaced from **28** communities due to escalating settler violence. Israeli authorities also issued demolition orders affecting 200 homes and structures near Jericho and others near Nablus. The settlement project east of Jerusalem, based on the green light given by the Israeli occupation Supreme Court years ago, includes the demolition and evacuation of Khan



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al-Ahmar. Minister Ben Gvir has repeatedly called for the demolition of the Bedouin community, claiming it was built without a permit.

The name of Khan al-Ahmar returned to the forefront recently with the arrest by Israeli occupation police of two girls defending their younger brother (8 years old) from an attack by a settler. This incident shed light once again on the suffering of Bedouin communities east of Jerusalem, living in an area of extreme sensitivity completely controlled by Israeli occupation authorities. The settlers continuously harass them in an attempt to evict them. Inside the 1948 occupied territories, Israeli occupation authorities demolished the village of Al-Araqueeb in the Negev (south) **222** times in **13** years. Each time, the residents rebuild the village after its demolition. Israel has also demolished homes and structures in the West Bank, issuing demolition orders affecting 200 homes and structures near Jericho and others near Nablus.

Without going back to past years and the factors of frustration, despair, and anger they left in the hearts of Palestinians, the toll of just one year of Israeli occupation violations alone was enough to serve as the catalyst that triggered reactions. It was one of the waves that turned the “Al-Aqsa Flood” into an anticipated battle, where the only change was the element of surprise, and the Israeli occupation suffered losses that were not taken into account.