

Sharp rise in right-wing attacks on Palestinians and Israeli peace and rights activists

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Last weekend saw violent attacks on Palestinian-Israelis and Israeli peace activists. Ten people were hospitalised with cuts, lacerations, fractures, and other injuries after being attacked by Israeli Jews.

Three Palestinian-Israeli citizens were sitting on the beach at Kiryat Haim, in the northern port city of Haifa, when a young man approached them and asked if they were Arabs. Just minutes after they answered that they were, he returned with nine youths, armed with metal rods, chains, clubs and knives, and attacked them.

Yair Elalouf, a Jewish Israeli who came to their aid and called the police, said that if he and his friend hadn't intervened, "they [the attackers] would've murdered them." He said that at least 70 to 80 people witnessed the attack, but none of them intervened or called the police even though the assailants "had brutally beaten them with the clubs for 3-4 minutes, and one of the attackers used an iron chain, maybe of a motorcycle or a bike."

The victims—Dr Muhammad Yousefeen from the Ichilov Hospital at the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center, a 28-year-old nurse and a 20-year-old man—said the attack was racially motivated, adding that the attackers swore at them and said, "You are Arab dogs, don't stay here."

They thanked Elalouf later at the police station, saying, "Without him, we wouldn't have stayed alive" and they went to see him to thank him again. He said, "They took my phone number, wanted to invite me to Shfaram [their neighbourhood] to eat with them, and wanted to come to my house with their families. I told them they are more than welcome."

He added, "People ask me all the time, 'Did you know they were Arabs?' Of course I knew, but it doesn't matter who they were. I would do the same for anyone. If it is an Ethiopian, an Arab, or a Jew. It does not matter. If someone needs help, he should receive it. I wish the

whole country thought like this."

Elalouf's attitude contrasted sharply with that of the police, which was one of indifference. While the police later arrested two suspects, they released them and put them on house arrest following a court appearance. The judge criticized the police for failing to examine the video footage of the incident thoroughly or produce adequate evidence to link the suspects to the attack.

In a second incident, five Jewish Israelis set upon two Palestinian-Israeli construction workers in Binyamina, south of Haifa, with knives and clubs. While the police claimed the attack was not a hate crime, the two Palestinians, who were taken to the hospital with cuts and bruises, said the attackers called them "Arab terrorists."

One of the victims told *Ynet* that a girl "called the police and claimed we wanted to rape her. A few minutes later, more people showed up and one of them stabbed me. We ran away and went to the police. When I got to the station, I fell, they called an ambulance and I was taken to hospital. This incident could have ended in tragedy. I could have been shot because someone said 'terrorists.'"

Again, the police tried to make out it was just a brawl and had nothing to do with racism. The Palestinian who was lightly wounded contradicted this, saying, "I was surprised when the police said a fight broke out. The attack was nationalistically motivated. We didn't hurt anyone, and we don't know the people that hit us. I wonder why the police are attempting to shake off all responsibility. This incident is severe, we saw death facing us."

In a third incident, 15 masked settlers from Mitzpe Yair, an illegal outpost, attacked activists with Ta'ayush (Co-existence), a volunteer group of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians working for "a future of equality, justice and

peace,” near Hebron in the West Bank. The peace activists were documenting illegal settlement construction in a nearby outpost and acts of vandalism against residents of a neighboring Palestinian village. Five of the activists, all Israeli Jews, needed hospital treatment for their injuries. Cameras and other equipment were damaged.

The previous week, a 40-year-old army reservist was recorded on camera hitting a member of Ta’ayush, who was accompanying Palestinian farmers in the Hebron Hills area to their fields to protect them against settlers who carry out a constant campaign of intimidation and violence. The reservist was heard saying, “There are events by ‘anarchists against fences,’ there is the ‘ugly parade’ and the ‘traitor parade’—which one are you?” He was discharged from the army because of the incident.

A bill is currently going through the Knesset that will criminalize photographing and documenting the Israeli army and prohibit the dissemination of footage of the army on social and mainstream media to prevent any criticism of, or sanctions against, the military’s activities.

Racially motivated incidents are appearing with increasing frequency, as well as settler violence against the Palestinians to which the security forces turn a blind eye. A report into incitement on social media for the year 2017 published by 7amleh, the Arab Center for Social Media Advancement, records 445,000 calls for violence, hate speech posts and curses against Palestinians. One out of nine posts about Palestinians contained a call for violence or a curse. Fifty thousand Israeli social media users wrote at least one inciting post against Palestinians.

7amleh noted that while Facebook has intensified its efforts to suspend, delete and ban Palestinian accounts and pages under the pretext of “incitement”, 82 percent of Israeli incitement takes place on Facebook, with 2017 witnessing a large increase in the number of right-wing Facebook groups and pages that incite against Palestinians. These include: The Shadow (an extreme right-wing Israeli singer), Roaring for the Right, Against Extreme Leftist Media, Reclaiming Jewish Nationality, Fighting for the Land of Israel and The Lies of the Leftists (all translated from Hebrew) as well as “the rising incitement perpetrated on Facebook pages of mainstream Israeli media.”

This climate of hostility has been deliberately whipped up by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud-led coalition government. Netanyahu famously warned his supporters on Election Day in 2015, when he thought his Likud Party might lose power, against the Arabs, who he

said were “coming out in droves” to vote.

A study published in May by the Coalition Against Racism in Israel provides a list of examples indicating the degree to which the use of racist language among Israeli political leaders, as well as rabbinical authorities, has become commonplace.

The nationality law, enshrining Israel’s status as the nation-state of the Jewish people, not the state of all its citizens irrespective of religion or ethnicity, is also fanning the flames of racial hatred. Its passing follows the Trump administration’s move of the US embassy to Jerusalem in May and support for the murder of 171 unarmed and defenceless Palestinians and the wounding of thousands more during protests at the Gaza-Israel border by the Israel Defense Forces since March 30.

Israel’s right-wing parties, all led by nationalist forces or former Likud Party members, including the Zionist Union that includes the Labour Party, have encouraged and fostered racism in pursuit of the Greater Israel policy. The advocacy of communalist and ethno-religious politics, including ethnic cleansing, has involved countless attacks on Palestinians, Israel’s own Palestinian citizens and migrant workers, and now Jewish Israelis who support them.

As the gap between rich and poor has grown, the state has increased its reliance on right-wing settlers and extreme nationalist zealots, who provide the basis for the emergence of fascistic tendencies within Israel, to divert the growing anger over declining living standards and social inequality along reactionary lines.



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