
FEBRUARY 2016 IN PALESTINE: HUMAN RIGHTS OVERVIEW

GENERAL SITUATION

According to OCHA, [February was the month with more demolitions since 2009](#). “The number of demolitions for just the first six weeks of 2016 is greatly alarming,” said Mr. Piper (Coordinator for Humanitarian and UN Development Activities for the occupied Palestinian territory) “Over 400 Palestinians have been displaced from their homes – equivalent to over half the total number of Palestinians displaced in all of 2015.”

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights on its [weekly reports](#) keeps denouncing the continued use of excessive force in the oPt, the targeting of border areas along the Gaza Strip, house demolitions and collective punishment, among other flagrant violations of Human Rights in Palestine.

There has been an increased pressure and harassment of Israeli Human Rights NGOs and Human Rights activists, as noted in the cases of the campaigns against [Breaking the Silence](#) and [B’tselem](#) or in the arrests of [Ezra Nawi and Guy Butavia](#), both members of the group Ta’ayush

HIGHLIGHTS: OPEN SHUHADA STREET, HEBRON AS THE LIVING IMAGE OF THE RACIAL SEGREGATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

On February the 25th Palestinians commemorate the anniversary of the Cave of the Patriarchs Massacre, also known as the Hebron Massacre. On February 25th 1994, Baruch Goldstein walked into the Ibrahimi Mosque and open fire on a large number of Palestinians who were praying inside the mosque. 29 of them were killed and 125 were injured. Goldstein, who was killed as well during the assault, was an American Israeli part of the Kach movement, a far right political party considered today as a terrorist group by the European Union, the United States of America and Israel itself. Those 29 Palestinians killed by Goldstein were not the only victims of the massacre, the Washington office of the Palestine Human Rights Information Center reported that in the month following Goldstein’s crime, the Israeli army killed 44 Palestinians and wounded more than 800 other. The massacre took part in the midst of the Oslo peace talks and only in 1997 an [agreement on a partial redeployment in Hebron](#) was signed¹. Since then, it is administratively divided in two areas: H1, under control of the PA, where around 140,000 Palestinians live and H2, under the control of the Israeli Army,

¹ Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron January 17, 1997

inhabited by another 30,000 Palestinians and around 500 settlers. In April 2002, the IDF took full control of the entire city. Permanent watchtowers were erected in the H1-area in 2003.

Hebron is one of the most populated Palestinian cities, with around 170,000 inhabitants. Unlike in other Palestinian territories, Hebron settlements are not located outside the city but within the heart of it, mainly within its Old City. This causes frequent incidents of violence and harassment from the settler population towards the Palestinian residents. An increased network of checkpoints and restricted areas makes of Hebron the living image of racial segregation, being Shuhada Street the most notorious image of these restrictions and of the occupation regime.

Shuhada Street was closed to Palestinians 21 years ago. It was partially re-opened in 1997-1998 but has Palestinian presence in the street has been banned since 2003. According to the Hebron Protocol the street should be fully accessible to the Palestinian population². However, Palestinian residents of Shuhada Street must enter their homes through alleyways or by jumping from adjacent rooftops. Only Israelis and internationals are allowed to walk through this street, former hub of the Hebronite commercial activity transformed nowadays in a ghost city.

The Open Shuhada Street Campaign, started in 2010 by the local group Youth Against Settlements, holds every year a huge nonviolent protest in this very same street in order to commemorate the anniversary of the Hebron Massacre and to denounce the situation of segregation and continuous violence and human rights abuse to which Palestinian inhabitants are subjected to. Just like the activists of the civil rights movement in the US back in the 60's, Palestinians Human Rights Defenders are demanding in 2016 the end of racial segregation and discrimination in the streets of Hebron.

During this year's nonviolent demonstration the Israeli police declared the area a "closed military zone" and violently repressed the protest, shooting tear gas and firing stun grenades. [12 Israeli activists](#) were arrested, among them Professor Gadi Algazi, one of the leaders of Tarabut – Hithabrut, who stated that he has come to Hebron to

² Art. 7 Normalization of Life in the Old City

a. Both sides reiterate their commitment to maintain normal life throughout the City of Hebron and to prevent any provocation or friction that may affect the normal life in the city.

b. In this context, both sides are committed to take all steps and measures necessary for the normalization of life in Hebron, including:

1. The wholesale market - Hasbahe - will be opened as a retail market in which goods will be sold directly to consumers from within the existing shops.

2. The movement of vehicles on the Shuhada Road will be gradually returned, within 4 months, to the same situation, which existed prior to February 1994.

“stand alongside the residents of Hebron, against the occupation, and against turning Hebron into a ghetto.”

A week later two Palestinians, [one of them a photojournalist](#), were arrested as well during a nonviolent protest.

The group of Human Rights Defenders in Hebron is a highly vulnerable one. The organisation Youth Against Settlements (YAS) is one of the groups that works in the heart of the city to promote justice and human rights through nonviolent tactics and strategies. They are a [frequent target](#) of attacks and harassment from both settlements and the Israeli army. [Issa Amro](#), the coordinator of YAS recently stated that *“The Israeli occupation forces are making our lives impossible”* Their office is being declared a closed military area and Amro has been arrested a dozens times. His last arrest occurred on February 29th outside of this house while speaking to tour group from Breaking the Silence. He was blindfolded, hand cuffed and taken to Gush Etzion prison. He was accused of organising illegal protests and of using social media to incite against the Israeli army. He will be shortly summoned to a Military Court.

Likewise, Farid Al-Atrash was arrested on February 26th, during the Open Shuhada Street yearly protest. Al-Atrash, Head of the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) office in the southern West Bank and member of the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC) was sent to the Military Court on February 29th for his first hearing. The Court ruled to extend the arrest period until March 3rd. The PSCC [strongly condemned](#) the extension of Farid’s arrest, as well as expressed their concerns at the “at the continuous arrests, harassment and prosecution of Human right defenders and activists”. Both Human Rights Defenders were released on March 1st.