THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE for Palestinian Human Rights

2435 Virginia Ave. NW • Washington, DC 20037
(202) 342-8347

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BULLETIN

January 1992

ISRAEL SUPPORTS VIGILANTES

Hundreds of millions of dollars will apparently be diverted from domestic needs to guarantee loans to Israel. Regarding Israeli human rights policies, we have received this report from Dr. Frank Collins, well known authority on The Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Armed settlers have shot up Palestinian villages under curfew over the past several weeks while members of the Israeli army quietly stood by. The Israeli government, for its part, has chosen this time to give the settlers permission to establish their own armed police units, under the name "civil guards."

According to CCINGO, the ad hoc group coordinating the international nongovernmental welfare and development organizations in the occupied territories, the settlers have taken advantage of army-imposed night-time curfews to rampage through Palestinian towns and villages, smashing cars, destroying property, cutting telephone lines, firing at rooftop water tanks and terrorizing residents. Armed settler access to and control of Palestinian towns and villages remains largely unchallenged by the military authorities.

Armed settler action against Palestinian residents of the occupied territories are not new, but have greatly increased recently. Their support by the government is implied in the announcement made on December 25 by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Defense Minister Moshe Arens and Attorney General Yosef Harel which authorized the "civil guards."

Uri Ariel, the head of the Council of Jewish Settlements has told the press to expect escalation of settler actions in the West Bank. He said that these actions would include marches into Palestinian villages and patrols at highway crossroads as well as military and political pressure to fight the intifada. Ariel said "We have decided to take matters into our own hands because the authorities are evading their responsibilities."

Atrocities are occurring on both sides of this virtual civil war. Beatings and killings of Palestinian civilians by the Israeli army and the killing of Jews by Palestinians are being followed by vigilante actions by the Jewish settlers. Unfortunately, violence follows violence in an ascending spiral.

This is taking place at a time when our Secretary of State James Baker is calling for confidence-building measures to help the peace process that he has so painstakingly promoted.

As the chief supporter of Israel, we bear a special responsibility for the success of the Middle East peace process politically and economically. We urge the Congress to call upon Israel to rescind support of settler quasi-militias and to adopt confidence-building measures in the occupied territories that are essential to provide the proper background to give diplomacy a chance.