

Hebron settlers stepping up attacks

Yaakov Katz, THE JERUSALEM POST

Mar. 20, 2005

Settler attacks on Palestinians in Hebron are on the rise and are expected to only escalate as the evacuation from the Gaza Strip draws closer, a senior police officer warned Sunday.

"The settlers have already declared they intend to create disturbances and attack Palestinians to try and draw police away from Gaza," the officer said. "They have their own agenda and nothing can stop them including the police or the courts system."

Police in Hebron have their hands full after the number of settler attacks on Palestinians in recent weeks has drastically increased. On Thursday, an 18-year-old settler from Kiryat Arba attacked a 17-year-old Palestinian in the Machpela Cave. A day earlier, a group of settlers brought down the roof of a Palestinian home near Herbon's Avraham Avinu Jewish neighborhood. One policeman was injured in the attack.

In an effort to put the brakes on the recent escalation in the attacks, police said they were using all available means to prevent contact between the settlers and their Palestinian neighbors. Police also said they use intelligence to ascertain where and when the next attack will happen to hopefully prevent it from occurring.

Calling the recent attacks in Hebron "severe," police said the incidents were unique since they were mostly perpetrated by minors who are immune to criminal charges. There is no doubt however, they said, the children were directed by adults who ordered them to perpetrate the attacks.

"Our hands out tied," the officer said. "We come and stop the attacks after they happen but even so the children have some great achievements under their belts."

The Hebron settlers, police said, are deterred by nothing and repeatedly attack security forces which show up to stop an attack.

"When soldiers and police try to enforce the law and stop the settler attacks they become vulnerable to the attacks as well and have things thrown at them," the officer said.

The courts, police said, were also responsible for the recent increase in the attacks. The punishments are too low and are essentially ineffective in deterring and preventing settlers from attacking Palestinians in the future.

"The courts need to do very quickly change their approach," the officer said. "The process is too long and once it finishes it is ineffective. If the people would receive lengthier sentences then over the years the number of attacks would decrease."

Spokesman for the Hebron Jewish community David Wilder admitted that tension between the settlers, police and the Palestinians was on the high side but rejected claims that settlers have stepped up the number of attacks against Palestinians.

"I am not aware of attacks by Jews on Palestinians and as far as I know it hasn't happened," Wilder said. "If there has been an increase in Hebron then it was in Palestinian attacks against Jews."

Regarding police accusations that settlers send children to perpetrate the attacks since they cannot be charged, Wilder said, "the children are not sent by anyone but rather they know exactly what is going on and sometimes they even get upset at us since they think we don't do enough and they go and do things on their own."

Meanwhile Sunday, four settlers were arrested by police after they allegedly attacked a group of Palestinian farmers working in a field near Nablus.



This article can also be read at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JParticle/ShowFull&cid=1111288727276&p=1078027574097>

[[Back to the Article](#)]

Copyright 1995-2005 The Jerusalem Post - <http://www.jpost.com/>