

The logo for the Foundation for Middle East Peace, featuring the text "FOUNDATION FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE" in white serif font on a dark blue rectangular background with a thin gold border.

Kristin McCarthy &lt;kmccarthy@fmep.org&gt;

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## Update from Breaking the Silence: Settler violence and annexation in the West Bank, human shields in Gaza

3 messages

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Joel Carmel <joel@shovrimshatika.org>  
To: Kristin McCarthy <kmccarthy@fmep.org>

Tue, Sep 24, 2024 at 10:10 AM

Dear Kristin,

The violence of the last year is unrelenting, with every day bringing news of yet another escalation - most recently with what appears to be the beginnings of a fully-fledged war with Hezbollah - such that it's almost impossible to give the necessary attention to all of the issues that rightly demand it. Nevertheless, I'd like to highlight a few of the key subjects we've been focusing on recently, and which demand international attention.

### **Preventing a repeat forced expulsion from Khirbet Zanuta**

The village of Khirbet Zanuta is one of the 19 villages that was forcibly expelled by a combination of settlers and soldiers (and settler-soldiers) at the beginning of the war from Area C of the West Bank. Zanuta is a relatively large herding community, with some 250 or more residents, making it a landmark case. Following continuous attacks and threats from the settlers of the nearby outposts, the villagers left on October 28th, and settlers, led by Yinon Levy who has been widely sanctioned internationally, proceeded to destroy their homes to ensure they would have nowhere to return to. A months-long legal battle has ensued, and in July the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the residents had the right to return and instructed the Israeli authorities to provide the necessary protection to allow them to do so. Since the return of nine families to the village on August 21st, the residents have sustained hundreds of attacks from settlers and constant harassment from Israeli authorities. Most frustrating perhaps is the fact that since the residents are unable to obtain building permits from the Israeli Civil Administration, they are unable to reconstruct their homes that were destroyed by the settlers. Even erecting a simple piece of cloth to protect themselves from the scorching sun is deemed an offense in that respect, and these cloths have been confiscated countless times. So far, most of the nine families who returned in August have left. More information on the Kirbet Zanuta case can be found in [this factsheet](#) put together by Dr Adv. Quamar Mishirqi-Assad, the attorney representing the village residents.

The case of Khirbet Zanuta holds enormous symbolic importance in that the success or failure of the residents' return will set an important precedent for many of the other villages that have been forcibly expelled. We urge stakeholders and people in positions of influence in the international community to act decisively, to apply pressure to the Israeli authorities with regards to allowing for reconstruction of the village (with the pre-October status quo as the relevant reference point for 'new' construction) without fear of the authorities demolishing homes or confiscating equipment, as well as law enforcement against the violent settlers who are intent on making it impossible for residents to live there.

### **The Silent Coup: Settler-Right's plans to annex the West Bank bearing fruit**

While the war in Gaza has raged on, the ultranationalist ministers in the Netanyahu government have been working effectively and stealthily to exploit the relative lack of attention on the West Bank, in order to advance their long term plans to effectively erase the Green Line and turn the West Bank into an official part of the State of Israel. This has already been the case de facto for years, but it is now impossible to argue that these efforts do not constitute a de jure annexation, in explicit contravention of international humanitarian law. Finance Minister Betzalel Smotrich, who is also a minister in the Defense Ministry with responsibility over the Civil Administration (effectively the military government that administers day to day life in the West Bank), has been hard at work to 'change the DNA' of the system in place to subordinate it to himself and his ultranationalist allies. I wrote about this in an earlier email, but the subject is still entirely pertinent, especially given the extreme settler violence mentioned above. For that reason, we recently released a new report, which is now available in English, '[The Silent Coup: Changing the Nature of Israel's control in the West Bank - an analysis of the Israeli Government's Annexation Policy](#)', together with our partners at the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, Ofek, and Yesh Din. Please take a look at the report, or the [Executive Summary](#), and feel free to be in touch if you have any follow-up questions or would like to schedule a briefing on the subject.

### **Use of Palestinians as human shields in Gaza**

Over the course of the current Gaza War we've collected a steady flow of testimonies from IDF soldiers who have been involved in the fighting. One of our most significant findings from those testimonies, which we were pleased to be able to bring to the attention of a number of media outlets, was the breathtaking revelation of [the use of Palestinians from Gaza as human shields](#) in the course of the fighting. According to the testimonies, these Palestinians were forcibly sent into potentially booby-trapped buildings or tunnels before IDF forces entered, in order to minimise the risk to IDF soldiers - by essentially transferring that risk to Palestinian civilians. The practice appears to be very widespread, in use across different military units operating across the Strip, throughout the war, and according to [an investigation](#) by Yaniv Kubovich who originally broke the story for Haaretz, was approved or at least known about by the very highest ranks of the IDF - including the Chief of Staff and the Head of the Southern Command. Our testifiers also told us that in many cases the Palestinians used as human shields, including children and the elderly, were often taken from the humanitarian corridor and simply released back to their communities once the military was done with them, making the (morally indefensible) argument that these Palestinians were cruel terrorists who had it coming to them redundant.

As I mentioned, these are just three of the many issues we've been focusing on, and as an organisation of former soldiers campaigning to end the occupation, unfortunately there's plenty more on our plate. Yet, the urgency of all three cannot be understated and hence the necessity to place them firmly on the international community's agenda.

As always, I'm available to meet and discuss any of the above - please feel free to reply to this email.

As we approach the Jewish New Year, I wish you a Shana Tova (a good new year) - hoping that in the coming year, together with our partners here and around the world, we will be able to bring the change needed to end the occupation and bring us the peace and security we all deserve.

Warm regards,

Joel Carmel

Advocacy Director, Breaking the Silence

[www.breakingthesilence.org.il](http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il)

 שוברים שתיקה  ShovrimShtika



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**Kristin McCarthy** <[kmccarthy@fmep.org](mailto:kmccarthy@fmep.org)>  
To: Joel Carmel <[joel@shovrimshatika.org](mailto:joel@shovrimshatika.org)>

Wed, Sep 25, 2024 at 8:47 AM

This is such an informative update (though harrowing), thank you for sending!

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To: Kristin McCarthy <[kmccarthy@fmep.org](mailto:kmccarthy@fmep.org)>

Wed, Sep 25, 2024 at 12:41 PM

Yes, harrowing indeed. Thanks nonetheless for your interest and support.

Regards  
Joel

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