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Palestine

East Jerusalem's Issawiya under attack

- News from around the world -

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Israel is exploiting the local and international attention on the Gaza Strip to continue its oppression and attacks on the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Issawiya. Police raids, begun shortly after Israel commenced its military operation against the Gaza Strip on July 8, are now a nightly occurrence.

Attacks against Palestinians in the West Bank also continue unabated.

"Police and border police enter the village every evening from sunset or later", reports Mohammad Abu Humus, resident of Issawiya and a member of the Issawiya Follow-Up Committee. "They spray skunk water on homes and cars, and indiscriminately shoot tear gas canisters in the village. Our homes and cars now have a permanent rancid odor, while everyone suffers from the tear gas - women, children, the elderly", Abu Humus adds.

The police shot rubber-coated steel bullets over the past several nights in an effort to disperse local demonstrations which sprung up in protest of the police raids and actions. "Friday after prayers was particularly bad, Abu Humus notes, "with several people wounded. One of the bullets went through an open window and almost hit a small child who was standing there."

Issawiya residents report that police officers threw stones in the village on several occasions, causing damage to parked vehicles. When local residents complained and requested for papers for their insurance companies, they are told to go away.

When news of the attacks on Gaza are broadcast, the police often walk through the village, hitting and harrasing residents for no reason. Many in Issawiya are wearing special t-shirts in solidarity with the Gaza Strip, and at times the police rip these shirts off the backs of Palestinians wearing them.

Small forces of police and border police are stationed near Issawiya's entrances, from where they can observe the village and stop drivers at will for no reason other than to highlight their presence.

"By causing suffering for everyone in the village, the police are attempting to raise tension and cause fights amongst families here", Abu Humus adds sadly. "The police believe that such tension will lower our popular resistance to the Israeli occupation and solidarity with the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian people are strong, however, and that just won't happen" states Abu Humus.

Abu Humus himself was one of some 200 Palestinians wounded at a mass demonstration near the Qalandiya checkpoint on 24 July. He is still healing from the bullet which hit him in the ankle.

Issawiya suffers from all the problems facing East Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territory more generally. A neighbourhood of some 15,000 residents, it is encircled by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the settlement of French Hill (built on confiscated Issawiya lands) and an Israeli military base. A national park is slated to be constructed on confiscated Issawiya lands, the last open area in which the neighbourhood can expand. It suffers from home demolitions, arrests, lack of classrooms for its children and featured prominently in the news last year when Issawiya resident Samer Issawi conducted a 266 day hunger strike in Israeli prison.

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