

February 2, 2019

Dear Minister Freeland,

I am writing to you to express my grave concern with respect to the Israeli government decision to force the Temporary International Presence (TIPH) out of occupied Hebron and to urge you to take action to force Israel to reverse this decision.

Prime Minister Netanyahu accusing TIPH of being, “an international force that acts against us.” I cannot imagine anything further from the truth based on my time in Hebron five years ago as a human rights observer and my recent visit there. TIPH has brought a modicum of safety to Palestinians in that area. Palestinians, including very young children, face some of the most violent illegal settlers in the West Bank and an Israeli military that treats Palestinians, including children going to school, as something other than humans deserving dignity and respect for their human rights under international law.



(Palestinian boys under the age of 12 arrested in Hebron while I served as a human rights observer.)

As I stated in my report to you dated, Jan. 16, 2019, “The situation in H2 has deteriorated from five years ago. Vendors in the market have seen a marked decrease in business as settlers continue to disrupt and harass them by throwing human excrement and household garbage from apartments above down on the market stalls.”

In my brief recent visit, I witnessed Israeli military personnel aggressively harass and search Palestinians who were leaving the Tomb of the Patriarchs. I also witnessed a Palestinian being beaten by Israeli military personnel when he offered minimal resistance to arrest in the streets of Hebron.

These incidents reminded me of five years ago when I stood on a quiet street corner near Shuada Street and noticed a small red dot appear on my chest that originated from an Israeli soldier aiming his rifle at me from across the street. At that time, the street was quiet and I believe his/her action was purely an intimidation tactic directed toward me as a human rights observer clearly wearing the vest provided by the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel.



(The Israeli sniper who targeted me was behind these concrete blocks. I stood on the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street.)

During my recent visit, I encountered TIPH members doing a routine patrol in the market near a stall where bottles filled with human excrement were trapped in a net above them. I cannot imagine what will happen to the level of violence that will be directed against Palestinians, including innocent children, in the area around the market and the Ibrahimi Mosque.



(Nets and tarps above market stalls used to stop containers filled with human excrement and household garbage from falling on vendors and customers in the Hebron Market in H2.)

Minister, I urge you to join the other international voices such as the Norwegian government to express concern over Israel's decision to force out the TIPH.

Respectfully,

Rev. Steve Berube,
Chair: United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel.