

FROM GAZA TO THE WEST BANK

# THE SYSTEMATIC UNDERMINING OF HUMANITARIAN AID

## MAKING LIFE UNTENABLE FOR PALESTINIANS



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the pause in hostilities in Gaza took effect, the humanitarian situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has deteriorated significantly. A number of new checkpoints were set up, at least 20 new iron gates were reportedly installed at entrances of towns, and movement restrictions intensified all over the West Bank, cutting villages from cities, impeding access to services.<sup>1</sup> On 21 January, the Israeli forces launched a major military operation in Jenin, which included airstrikes alongside ground force operations. The operation was extended to Tulkarem on 27 January and to Tammun and El Far'a refugee camp.<sup>2</sup> Using tactics reminiscent of the atrocities witnessed in Gaza such as sieges, airstrikes, and movement restrictions, the operation has led to a level of violence, destruction and mass displacement in the West Bank not seen since the Second Intifada. The average number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank during the two weeks following the pause in hostilities in Gaza tripled, compared to the same period immediately prior.<sup>3</sup> More than 40,000 people have been forcibly displaced from Jenin, Tulkarem, Nur Shams, and El Far'a refugee camps, with many communities besieged, or cut off from essential services, worsening food insecurity and making life increasingly untenable.<sup>4</sup>

Settler violence has also continued to increase. In many cases, Israeli soldiers were present or taking part in these attacks, reflecting an ongoing pattern of state-backed violence that deepens threats to Palestinians and undermines humanitarian efforts.<sup>5</sup>

Israeli military and settler violence in the West Bank has been on the rise since at least April 2022, with 2023 marking the deadliest year in the West Bank since the UN started systematically monitoring these numbers<sup>6</sup>. Violence and killings remained at high levels in 2024<sup>7</sup>, as Israeli forces continued to use disproportionate, unnecessary, and indiscriminate force - including airstrikes on civilian areas and attacks on medical facilities - which constitute apparent violations of international human rights laws on the use of force.<sup>8</sup> In parallel, the Government of Israel's<sup>9</sup> *de facto* annexation of the West Bank is progressing quickly in breach of international law, as outlined in the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.<sup>10</sup> On 24 February, 2025, Israeli forces further escalated its military operations in the occupied West Bank, deploying tanks in the north for the first time in 20 years. Israeli officials have reportedly indicated that displaced Palestinian residents will not be allowed to return to their homes for at least a year.<sup>11</sup> Their presence in urban areas such as Jenin will likely severely disrupt humanitarian operations, obstructing aid delivery and restricting civilian movement.

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*... [our] social worker was on a field visit to the gatherings where refugees displaced from Jenin Camp were residing. While she was at a family's home assessing their needs, an airstrike hit a structure very close to the house, putting her at great risk. Under very difficult circumstances, the social worker was able to leave the area safely.*

– Humanitarian Worker, West Bank

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This snapshot offers an analysis of the impact of what the UN has described as the unlawful use of force by Israeli forces<sup>12</sup>, movement restrictions, and settler attacks have had on humanitarian organizations' ability to access affected communities since the pause in hostilities took effect in Gaza on January 19, 2025.<sup>13</sup> **Findings reveal that as the Israeli government has systematically undermined the unfettered access of aid in Gaza prior to pause in hostilities<sup>14</sup>, similar patterns are emerging in the West Bank.**

## Legal Obligations



The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), in its 18 September 2024 resolution, addressed the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) Advisory Opinion<sup>15</sup> that concluded Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) is unlawful and that the Government of Israel must bring its occupation to an end. The resolution states that third States also have an obligation not to recognize as legal the unlawful presence of Israel in occupied territory, nor to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation.

In the meantime, Israel as the occupying power is bound by international human rights law, which is applicable to the use of force during law enforcement. This means that the West Bank is not a zone of active hostilities to which international humanitarian law rules on the conduct of hostilities apply. The use of tactics such as airstrikes and targeting individuals not posing any imminent threat, is an example of Israel's use of unlawful, unnecessary and disproportionate force in the West Bank in violation of international human rights law.<sup>16</sup>

### HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

100%

of surveyed humanitarian organizations reported **increased difficulties in delivering aid** since the pause in hostilities in Gaza.



#### MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

93%

of surveyed organizations reported that **roadblocks, permit denials, and checkpoint delays hinder operations.**

#### MODIFICATIONS & CANCELLATIONS

83%

of surveyed organizations **had to modify or cancel humanitarian activities** due to security risks.

#### THREATS TO COMMUNITIES

86%

of organizations surveyed reported **increased exposure to violence, intimidation, and displacement** as Israeli forces and settlers escalate pressure on Palestinian communities.

#### DEMOLITIONS AS A TOOL OF DISPLACEMENT

74%

of surveyed organizations reported **intensified demolitions of homes, schools, and essential infrastructure.**

### Legal and bureaucratic barriers

New Israeli legislation that impacts INGOs, bans on UNRWA, and increased permit denials for aid workers are administrative measures that prevent aid from reaching at-risk Palestinian communities. Attacks on UNRWA in particular will lead to the dismantling of structures that uphold Palestinian refugee status and rights under international law.

Humanitarian aid in the West Bank is being undermined through a combination of airstrikes, restrictive movement policies, escalating security threats, targeted demolitions, and expanding legal and bureaucratic constraints. Unpredictable checkpoint closures, permit denials, and roadblocks have also severely disrupted aid delivery, while military raids on humanitarian facilities, including offices, warehouses and field sites, have heightened risks for humanitarian staff, particularly Palestinians. Settler violence is escalating, with aid workers facing physical attacks, harassment, roadblocks, and detentions, while humanitarian convoys are obstructed, infrastructure is vandalized, and entire communities are forcibly displaced.<sup>17</sup> Often occurring with Israeli military protection and legal impunity, this violence limits aid access, deters fieldwork, and undermines humanitarian operations. At the same time, demolitions of homes, schools, and infrastructure continue to displace communities and further obstruct relief efforts. These physical barriers are reinforced by new Israeli legal measures, the ban on UNRWA, and increased restrictions on international NGOs, further limiting humanitarian access and deepening the crisis. **This violence is not only restricting aid access but also risks forcible transfer and de facto annexation, systematically eroding Palestinian presence in the West Bank.**

# 1 Severe and unpredictable movement restrictions hinder humanitarian operations

Testimony from a humanitarian worker in the West Bank:



*"Since the ceasefire, my mornings begin at 6 a.m. with a difficult decision: which activities can proceed, and which must be postponed for safety reasons? I have only minutes to assess which checkpoints are open, where military operations or settler demonstrations might be happening."*



*"Suddenly, one soldier fired multiple shots into the air, then aimed his gun directly at us."*



*"I thought we were going to die. I have nightmares every night. I often break down in tears just thinking about it."*

The humanitarian organizations surveyed identified increased restrictions on movement, including more frequent road closures, new checkpoints and roadblocks, and increased checks and controls specifically on Palestinian staff, as impeding their ability to access communities to deliver aid and services. Incidents of staff being stranded in the communities they were working in due to sudden gate closures were also reported.

## MOST REPORTED ACCESS RESTRICTIONS IN THE SURVEY



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*Most of our employees' time is spent at the checkpoints, severely impeding the effectiveness and efficiency of their work. As a result, most of our program activities have been either cancelled, modified or postponed.*

*– Humanitarian Worker, West Bank*

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Survey respondents reported that following the pause in hostilities in Gaza, the road closures, checkpoints, roadblocks and increased checks and controls have resulted in deteriorating working conditions for humanitarian workers, especially Palestinian staff, operating in the West Bank. This is due to, among other things:



**Longer commute due to delays at checkpoints**



**Reduced income due to higher costs (fuel) linked to the longer commute**



**Increased stress due to tensions, intimidations and violence**



**Trauma and anxiety following serious incidents**

## 2 Delays and denials

Since the pause in hostilities in Gaza started on January 19, 2025, humanitarian organizations operating in the West Bank have faced significant access restrictions and security threats.

# 222

**Delays of aid access** for least 3 hours each time, totaling up to 28 days, during which vital humanitarian assistance was obstructed, as reported by 23 organizations.

# 305

**Full denials of aid workers' access** at checkpoints, as reported by 24 organizations.

# 338

Times in which humanitarian workers were **unable to reach their workplaces** and had to work remotely, as reported by 25 organizations.

# 98

Incidents in which **aid was fully blocked** at checkpoints, as reported by 12 organizations.

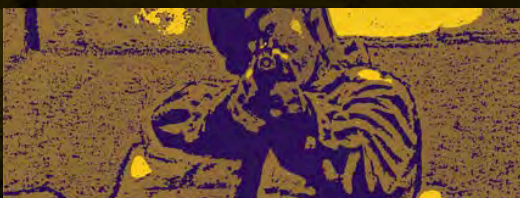
## 3 Staff safety

Between January 19-February 11, 25 organizations surveyed reported **257 cases of staff facing threats to their safety**, making it increasingly dangerous to access project sites - particularly noting those near settlements or areas of active settler activity. New checkpoints have increased the risk of incidents of violence, intimidation, interrogation, or detention by Israeli forces, especially for Palestinian staff members. 60% of surveyed organizations reported staff experiencing violence or intimidation at checkpoints by Israeli forces. 15 organizations reported **54 incidents of humanitarian workers being held or questioned by the Israeli military.**

Testimony from a humanitarian worker in the West Bank:



*"A week ago, a female colleague and I approached a checkpoint. Two soldiers signaled us, and we thought we had been cleared to pass. We followed protocol, driving forward slowly."*



*"Suddenly, one soldier fired multiple shots into the air, then aimed his gun directly at us."*



*"At that moment, I thought we were going to die. I have nightmares every night. I often break down in tears just thinking about it."*

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*My colleague was absent from work for two days. It turned out it was because she was recovering from an Israeli military raid on her house at night, which terrified her and her family, including small children*

*– Humanitarian Worker, West Bank*

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## Targeting of medics and medical assistance

Like local Palestinian ambulance and emergency services, humanitarian organizations that provide medical care services also face repeated delays and restrictions at the checkpoints.<sup>18</sup> Several organizations also reported that their medical teams and staff were targeted—facing arrests, attacks, and access denial—by Israeli forces or settlers while providing health care or attending to injured people.

*“We have teams working in Tulkarem and Balata refugee camps. They are under constant threat from Israeli forces when they carry out home visits to our health patients. They have also been forcibly displaced from their homes and their families had to seek refuge in other areas outside of the camps. Some of our health workers have been injured while attending to injured people, some others have been arrested, and one health worker was killed.” - Humanitarian worker, West Bank*

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*Our colleagues operating a mobile clinic team were having a meeting with one of the communities they serve when a group of settlers broke in and forced the meeting to end.*

*– Humanitarian Worker, West Bank*

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## 4 Attacks on humanitarian operations and infrastructure

Several organizations responding to the survey reported military activities directly impacting humanitarian operations and infrastructure. 16 organizations reported airstrikes affecting their areas of operation, indicating widespread impact on humanitarian activities. Seven organizations reported 13 cases where facilities used for aid operations were damaged or destroyed. Raids by the Israeli military on humanitarian facilities have also been prevalent, with 158 incidents reported by 19 organizations. These raids have further restricted aid delivery and posed direct threats to humanitarian workers.

*Israeli forces forcibly used an UNRWA health center in Arroub Camp in the southern West Bank as a detention site, violating the protected status of humanitarian infrastructure under international law.<sup>19</sup> This incident is part of a wider pattern of misuse of humanitarian facilities by Israeli forces, with over 190 forcible entries into UNRWA installations in the West Bank since October 2023, involving both Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups.<sup>20</sup> One-third of survey respondents reported that their offices or warehouses were violated by Israeli military operations.*

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*Occupation soldiers took over our offices for a week, and upon our return, they had been subjected to destruction and vandalism. This occurred in Tulkarem, where we work in offices shared by several local organizations. Our property was vandalized, and destroyed, and belongings were scattered.*

*– Humanitarian Worker, West Bank*

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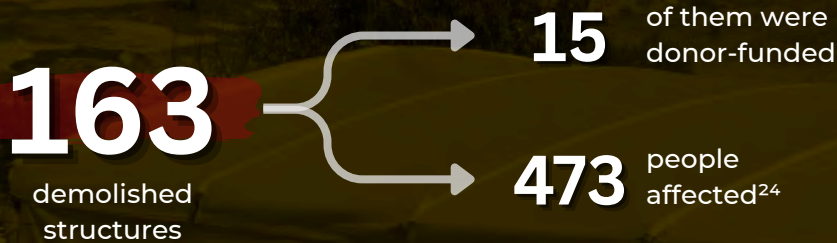
# 5

## Demolitions and the weaponization of bureaucracy

When asked about the impact on communities since the pause in hostilities in Gaza on January 19, 2025, 74% of organizations surveyed reported intensified demolitions of homes, schools, and essential infrastructure, leading to further displacement and instability.

In addition to Palestinian homes, clinics, schools, and water infrastructure, including humanitarian infrastructure funded by international donors, are systematically demolished under the pretext of lacking Israeli permits, which are nearly impossible to obtain<sup>21</sup>, while settlement expansion continues unchecked. Israeli demolitions reached a record high in 2024, with 1,768 structures destroyed—50 per cent more than in 2023.<sup>22</sup> This dual system not only physically destroys and diminishes the structures and land of Palestinian communities, but also obstructs humanitarian relief, reinforcing the control of Israeli authorities and systematically displacing Palestinians from their land.<sup>23</sup>

*Since 19 January, when the pause in hostilities in Gaza came into effect, until today, there were:*



# 6

## Settler threats to humanitarian infrastructure and personnel

Settler violence has surged<sup>25</sup>, with harassment of aid workers becoming a routine occurrence, according to survey results. Humanitarian staff, including medical teams and outreach workers, are frequently targeted while attempting to access at-risk communities. 79% of organizations surveyed noted a surge in settler violence since the pause in hostilities in Gaza, including attacks, harassment, property destruction, and restrictions on movement. Respondents of the survey reported instances of settlers detaining humanitarian staff, physically obstructing aid deliveries, vandalizing or destroying donor-funded facilities, and even disrupting meetings between aid workers and affected communities.



**12 organizations** reported that their staff were targeted by settlers while carrying out humanitarian activities.



**8 organizations** reported that their staff were targeted by settlers at home or while commuting to and from work.



**3 organizations** reported that their offices or warehouses were affected by settler violence.

*The threat to personal safety in the West Bank has become an everyday reality for both Palestinians and humanitarian workers. Every field visit or mission to an affected area is fraught with security risks, including the constant danger posed by settler violence, military operations, and the covert actions of Israeli security forces. This ongoing instability creates an environment where staff and beneficiaries are forced to make impossible choices between accessing essential services and ensuring their personal safety.*

*– Humanitarian Worker, West Bank*

Fear of settler violence is preventing humanitarian personnel, particularly women, from reaching communities. Many aid workers reported having to postpone or cancel visits to certain areas due to increased risk posed by Israeli settler presence and threat of violence.

*Our colleagues, particularly women colleagues, are extremely hesitant to visit and support communities where there is a risk of settler involvement. At the end of 2024, settlers detained four women staff during a community field visit. The visit took place in a closed military zone, which should mean settlers are not allowed access, but they showed up in military dress and held the women staff for two hours, making them sit on the ground. They threatened any international staff with deportation.*

*– Humanitarian Worker, West Bank*

Settler violence has also contributed to movement restrictions and operational challenges. Organizations reported facing obstructions when trying to deliver aid:

*Settlers routinely set up informal roadblocks near their outposts, preventing humanitarian convoys from reaching communities. These roadblocks are not removed even when Israeli authorities are notified.*

*– Humanitarian Worker, West Bank*

## 7 Coercive environment

Together, these measures - restrictions on aid, settler violence, demolitions, land confiscation, and the destruction of essential infrastructure including donor-funded infrastructure- are creating a coercive environment that is making daily life untenable for Palestinian communities. The dismantling of humanitarian aid in the West Bank is not only obstructing access to services, but making it increasingly difficult for Palestinians to sustain their lives there, heightening the risk of forcible transfer.<sup>26</sup>

When asked about the impact on communities since the pause in hostilities on January 19, 2025, 64.58% (31 respondents) reported risk of forced displacement, with communities being forcibly transferred due to ongoing threats, lack of services, or military orders.

In the shadow of Israel's military offensive in Gaza, the Government of Israel's *de facto* annexation of the West Bank is progressing quickly<sup>27</sup> in breach of international law and in defiance of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. The Israeli government has entrenched its control over Areas B and C of the West Bank<sup>28</sup> through a series of laws and administrative decisions<sup>29</sup>, advancing *de facto* annexation.<sup>30</sup>

According to survey respondents, the deteriorating security situation has also deterred diplomats and policymakers from conducting planned visits, limiting international oversight and diplomatic engagement. This lack of direct assessment by decision-makers risks reducing global attention, weakening advocacy efforts, and delaying policy interventions that could otherwise mitigate the crisis.

Without urgent action to address these access constraints, humanitarian organizations will face mounting challenges in delivering aid, while the absence of diplomatic presence may further entrench the crisis with limited external accountability.



# CALL FOR ACTION

In addition to the immediate steps states must take to ensure the current pause in hostilities is extended to a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, states must also take steps to prevent further suffering of civilians:

- States must uphold their legal obligations under the ICJ's Advisory Opinion on Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory, reinforced by the UNGA resolution, and take immediate action to halt Israel's annexation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and to end the unlawful occupation.
- States must ensure that the Government of Israel, as the occupying power, upholds its obligations under international law, protects and upholds the rights of Palestinians, refrains from excessive and unlawful lethal use of force, and guarantees unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance, prioritizing healthcare and other essential services in the West Bank.
- States must take concrete actions to stop forcible transfer, including demolitions and forced evictions, ensuring Palestinians' right to remain on their land.
- States must ensure that Israeli authorities lift all movement restrictions, and guarantee safe, unrestricted passage for Palestinians and humanitarian agencies. The safety and security of humanitarian actors must be guaranteed as they respond to the humanitarian imperative to assist communities, including Palestinian staff of INGOs, Palestinian NGOs, Civil Defence, and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society.
- States must halt the transfer of weapons, parts, and ammunition to prevent their use in violations of international law, as prescribed by the UNGA resolution on the ICJ's Advisory Opinion on Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory.
- States must urge the Government of Israel to reverse the Knesset bill banning UNRWA, and ensure its mandate is respected, including by immediately ceasing all attacks on the agency and its operations. States must also call on the Israeli government to rescind new measures that restrict humanitarian and civic space, including the recent decision of the government on INGO registration and visa requirements<sup>31</sup>, and proposed legislation imposing financial and operational restrictions on Israeli NGOs receiving foreign funding.<sup>32</sup>
- Donor governments should scale up funding to providers of humanitarian and development assistance to communities in Area C to enable aid organizations to reach all Palestinians in need of assistance, irrespective of location.

# REFERENCES

- 1 <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-266-west-bank>
- 2 <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-266-west-bank;>
- 3 According to OCHA, there were on average 7.5 fatalities a week between the 25 of November 2024 and the 20 January 2025 vs. an average of 21.5 fatalities a week from the 21 of January to the 3rd of February 2025. For more details see: <https://www.ochaopt.org/>
- 4 <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-264-west-bank>
- 5 <https://www.nrc.no/news/2025/january/escalation-in-the-west-bank-violations-surge-amid-fragile-ceasefire-in-gaza>
- 6 <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-monthly-snapshot-casualties-property-damage-and-displacement-january-2025>
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- 8 [UN rights office raises alarm over escalating violence in occupied West Bank | United Nations in Palestine](https://www.un.org/press/en/2025/01/1160171)
- 9 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-far-right-ally-said-to-agree-government-will-advance-w-bank-annexation/>
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- 11 <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/23/middleeast/israel-west-bank-campaign-expands-intl/index.html>
- 12 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/02/1160171>
- 13 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2025/01/concern-use-unlawful-lethal-force-jenin-occupied-west-bank>
- 14 <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/media/press-releases/israel-government-continues-to-block-aid-response-despite-icj-genocide-court-ruling-says-oxfam/>
- 15 See the ICJ advisory Opinion: <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/204176>
- 16 <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/un-human-rights-office-opt-un-human-rights-office-opt-condemns-recent-spate-killings-civilians-across-west-bank-and-gaza>
- 17 <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/ohchr-press-release-17sep24/>
- 18 For more information on this, see the report from MSF: <https://www.msf.org/inflicting-harm-and-denying-care-west-bank-msf-report-escalation-attacks-and-obstructions>
- 19 <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/west-bank-israeli-security-forces-use-unrwa-health-centre-temporary-detention-site-southern-West-Bank>
- 20 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israeli-forces-use-un-agency-health-center-as-detention-site-in-occupied-west-bank-unrwa/3481959>
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- 25 <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/humanitarian-situation-update-258-west-bank-enar>
- 26 <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/ohchr-press-release-17sep24/>
- 27 <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/01/23/middleeast/israel-turning-focus-on-west-bank-intl/index.html>
- 28 The 1995 Oslo II Accord established the administrative division of the Palestinian West Bank into areas A, B, and C as a transitional arrangement, pending a final status agreement. Oslo II intended for the divisions to be temporary, with full jurisdiction of all three areas gradually transferred to the Palestinian Authority over time. Instead, the divisions persist, with Area A administered by the Palestinian Authority, Area C by Israel, and Area B under joint control.

29 <https://www.yesh-din.org/en/about-the-database/>

30 In June 2024, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich transferred administrative control of Area C from the military to civilian settler-aligned authorities, effectively annexing Palestinian land. In a significant escalation in December 2024, the Israeli Knesset unilaterally legislated its control over key Area B lands, where civil powers had been delegated to PA under the Oslo Accords – Wye River Agreement, reflecting the foreseeable consequence of impunity afforded to illegal settlements and IHL violations in Area C. The Knesset is now set to vote on a bill that will facilitate Israeli settlers' land purchases in the West Bank. This legislation, which would repeal Jordanian land laws in place before the occupation, and asserts Israeli sovereignty over occupied territory, which the ICJ Advisory Opinion has concluded is unlawful, and will enable mass land transfers to settlers, deepen discrimination. See the ICJ advisory Opinion: <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/204176>

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32 <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-842776> (November 2024).