

## UK and partners join Palestinian farmers in olive harvesting

Heads of Mission and representatives from Belgium, the EU, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and the UK visited Qusra village in Nablus district. They took part in the olive harvest, which began this month and which has significant cultural and economic importance for Palestinians. The visit was organised by the British Consulate in coordination with the local community.

Participants heard from locals about settler violence in the Nablus district, which has affected Qusra village for several years and which tends to spike during the Olive Harvest season. In the discussion, participants reiterated their continued opposition to Israel's settlement policy and concern over the increased settlers' violence. They recalled how Israel, as the occupying power, is obliged under international law to protect the Palestinian population from attacks, to maintain public order in an impartial manner and to protect Palestinians and their property.

British Consul General Diane Corner said: "It is very special to participate in the Olive Harvest, but it is disheartening to hear about persisting settler violence throughout the start of the season. Settlers who are responsible for crimes against Palestinians must be held to account and incidents should be thoroughly investigated by the Israeli authorities, who should take all necessary measures to protect Palestinians against such violence."

From his side, the European Union Representative Sven Kühn Von Burgsdorff added: "Olive trees in Palestine are not just a source of income; they are part of the Palestinian cultural and national identity. Most of the olive trees are located in Area C of the West Bank where Palestinian farmers are facing frequent attacks by Israeli settlers. These attacks are unacceptable and perpetrators should be brought to justice by the Israeli authorities. The EU will continue its support to the Palestinian farmers, and particularly in Area C. This is in line with our known political objective of supporting the two state solution and maintaining the Palestinian presence in Area C which is and remains an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territory."

During the visit, UN OCHA briefed the diplomats on recent settler attacks against Palestinians across the West Bank and in the Nablus area in particular. The number of incidents of settler violence resulting in Palestinian casualties has risen year-on-year since 2016.

According to UN OCHA, nearly half of cultivated Palestinian agricultural land in the West Bank is planted with 10 million olive trees. Between 80,000 and 100,000 families in the West Bank rely on olive oil for primary or secondary sources of income.

Since 2014, the British Consulate General in Jerusalem and likeminded missions have supported over 180 Palestinian communities, including through

the provision of harvesting materials and by providing a protective and supporting presence during harvesting. This year, the British Consulate will continue to offer support through providing a protective presence during the olive harvest at three selected location, focusing particularly on Palestinian communities who have limited access to their lands, or who face the threat of demolition or settler violence.