News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(October 14 – 20, 2020)

Overview

▸In the Gaza Strip the number of active Covid-19 cases continues rising (1,893 as of October 20, 2020). In Judea and Samaria the curve is flattening, but the number of active cases is still high (4,477). The Hamas administration and the ministry of health in Ramallah are concerned about an outbreak of seasonal flu together with Covid-19 cases.

▸A rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory, hitting an open area to the north of the Gaza Strip. The IDF did not respond; otherwise the situation is relatively quiet.

▸Palestinians in Judea and Samaria continue throwing stones, rocks, Molotov cocktails and bottles of paint at Israeli vehicles.

▸**A delegation from the UAE which went to al-Aqsa mosque to pray was shamed and expelled** by local Palestinians. Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh said the mosque had to be entered through "the owners of the site" [i.e., the Palestinians] and not the "occupation" [i.e., Israel]. **Note**: After the UAE signed the agreement to normalize relations with Israel, the Palestinians said that anyone who came from the UAE to pray at al-Aqsa mosque would be driven out.

▸According to the Israeli media, the Israeli ambassador to the UN demanded UNRWA stop including incitement against Israel in the textbooks used in its schools. The UNRWA representative, Philippe Lazzarini, promised to examine the matter.

▸Palestinian spokesmen attacked UNRWA, claiming it had no right to interfere in school curriculums. They also claimed that UNRWA curriculums are based on those of the PA, reflect UNRWA values and are free of incitement. As far as the ITIC knows the PA has no far not formally related to the issue.

Covid-19 Infection

The situation in the Gaza Strip

In the Gaza Strip the number of active Covid-19 cases continues rising. Between October 19 and October 20, 2020, 99 new cases were detected, and as of October 20, 2020, the number of active cases stood at **1,893**. So far 28 Gazans have died. Despite the ongoing infection, the Hamas administration continues easing restrictions while attempting to preserve public health guidelines and take precautionary measures. The public health system is making preparations for a possible outbreak of seasonal flu in addition to Covid-19.

The situation in Judea and Samaria

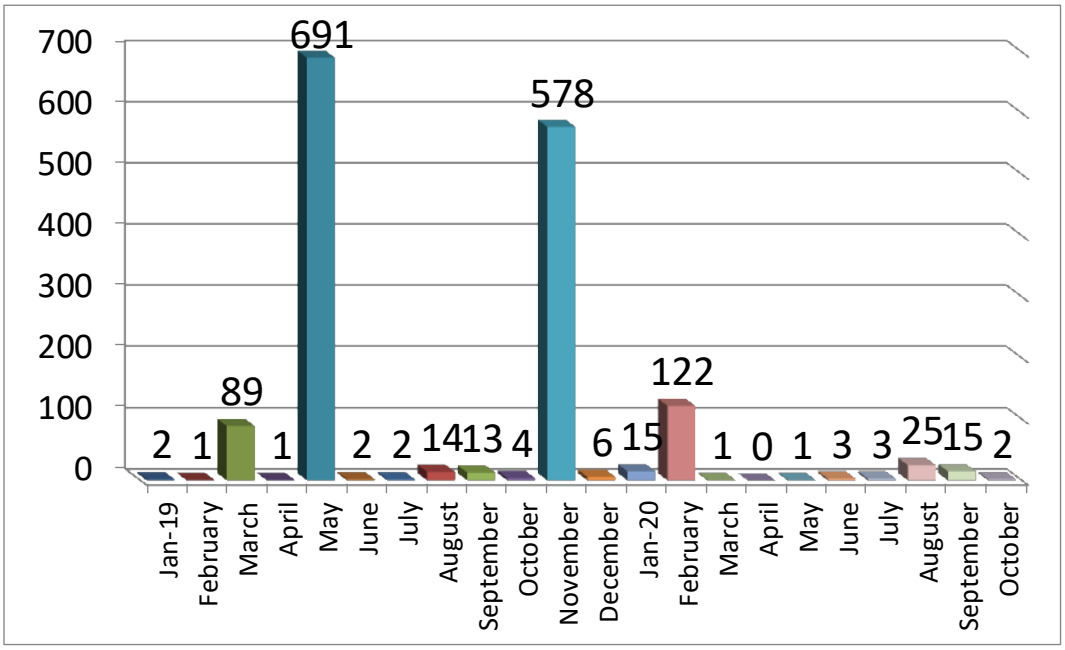
The number of verified active cases in Judea and Samaria is stabilizing but still high. So far in October 404 new cases have been detected and as of October 19, 2020, the total number of active cases stood at **4,447**. The total number of deaths is 386, up from 363 a week ago. There are 39 patients in ICUs, five of them on ventilators. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak 11,466 cases have been detected (Facebook page of the ministry of health in Ramallah, October 19, 2020). The heads of the public health system are concerned about an outbreak of seasonal flu in addition to Covid-19.

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

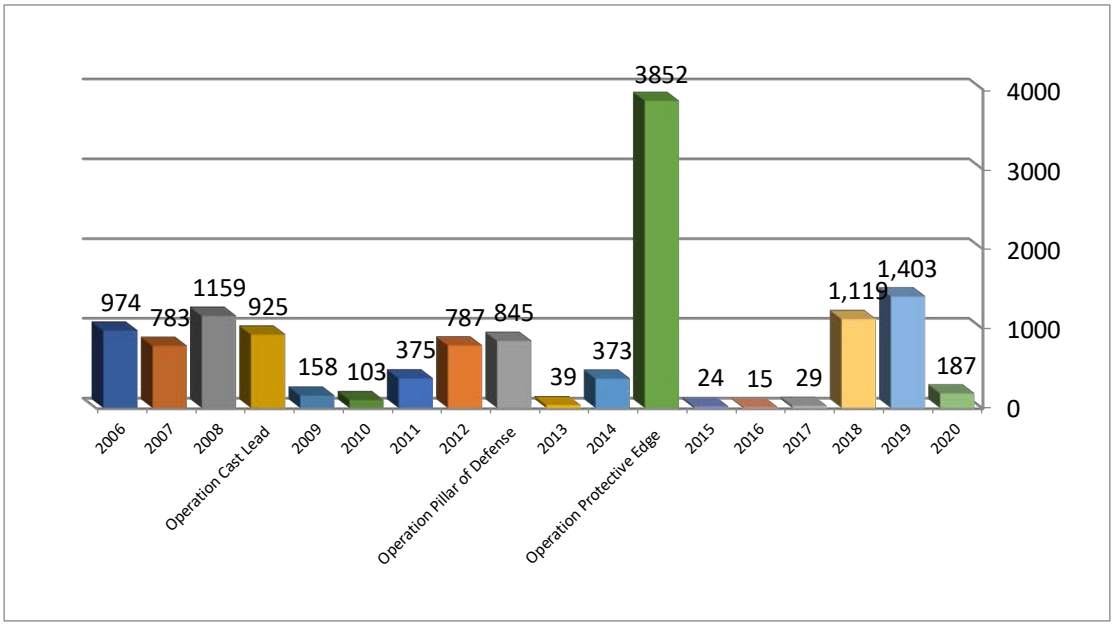
Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

- On the evening of October 17, 2020 a rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. It landed in an open area to the north of the Gaza Strip. No casualties were reported (IDF spokesman, October 17, 2020).

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Judea and Samaria

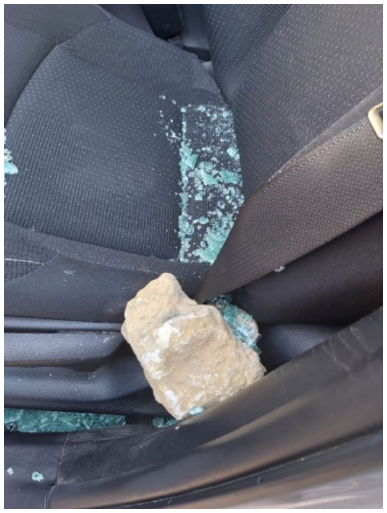
IED thrown at IDF soldiers

▸On the night of October 13, 2020, two IDF soldiers were wounded in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus during the detention of a wanted Palestinian. They were apparently injured by shrapnel from an IED thrown at the force (IDF spokesman, October 14, 2020).

Stones and Molotov cocktails

In Judea and Samaria Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles. The more prominent events were the following:[1]

- **October 18, 2020**: Three Molotov cocktails were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus southwest of Hebron. No casualties were reported.
- **October 18, 2020**: Stones were thrown at the community of Sha'arei Tikvah (northwest of Ariel). No casualties were reported.
- **October 18, 2020**: Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle west of Jenin. No casualties were reported
- **October 18, 2020**: Masked Palestinians threw stones at a civilian Israeli bus and other civilian Israeli vehicles northeast of Hebron. An Israeli was slightly injured; his vehicle was damaged.



Right: Rock thrown at Israel vehicle northeast of Hebron. Left: Driver's window shattered by rock (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, October 18, 2020).

- **October 18, 2020**: Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle south of Bethlehem. No casualties were reported.
- **October 16, 2020**: Stones were thrown at the community of Kokhav HaShahar (northeast of Ramallah). No casualties were reported
- **October 15, 2020**: Three Molotov cocktails were thrown at an IDF vehicle north of Hebron. No casualties were reported.

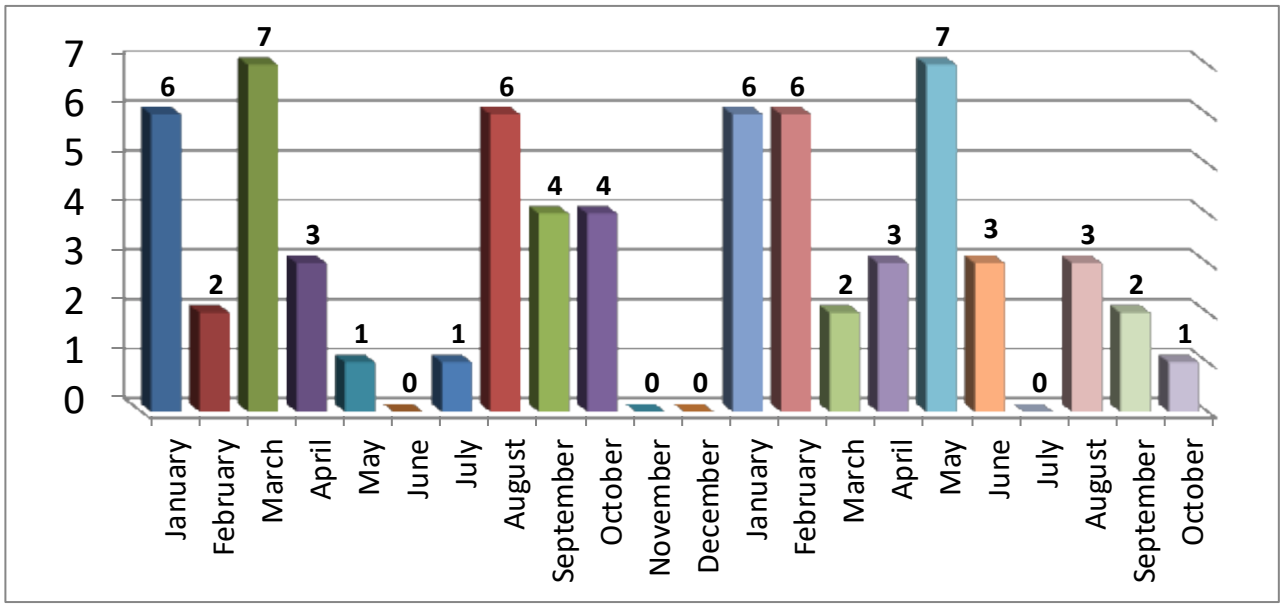
[1] All information and reports are from Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria unless otherwise noted.

◆**October 15, 2020**: Bottles of paint were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus west of Hebron. One bottle hit the front windshield. No casualties were reported

◆**October 14, 2020**: Two Molotov cocktails were thrown at the fence around the community of Psagot (east of Ramallah). No casualties were reported.

◆**October 13, 2020**: Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle northeast of Ariel. No casualties were reported.

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2019[2]



Developments in the Gaza Strip

Events marking the anniversary of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal

▸**Hamas held a rally in front of Red Cross headquarters in Gaza City to make the ninth anniversary of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal**. A speech was given by Iyad Abu Fanuna, a senior Hamas figure released in the deal. **He said Hamas would force Israel to release the prisoners**, and that the **"fighters of the resistance" [i.e., the terrorist operatives] were planning to abduct more IDF soldiers and officers**. **Ahmed al-Mudallal**, a senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad figure, also claimed the "resistance" had "many surprises" [in store for Israel] (Khabar, October 18, 2020).

[2]A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, a vehicular attack, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

Rally in Gaza City marking the anniversary of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal (Palestine Online Twitter account, October 18, 2020).

▸The ministry of prisoners and released prisoners' affairs organized a visit to the grave of Ahmed al-Jabari, who was the acting commander of Hamas' military wing and party to the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal. Flowers were placed on his grave and on the grave overview Mazen Fuqahaa, a senior operative in Hamas' military wing, who was released in the deal (and killed in the Gaza Strip in March 2017). Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan said **they would continue the path of al-Jabari until they effected the second [prisoner exchange] deal**. He said that any harm that came to [hunger-striking] Maher al-Akhras or other prisoners would be a declaration of war, and that the "resistance" would use all the measures at its disposal to free the prisoners (Palestine Online, October 18, 2020).

Ceremony held at the graves of Ahmed al-Jabari and Mazen Fuqahaa (Palestine Online Twitter account, October 18, 2020).

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) events marking the anniversary of the assassination of Israeli Minister of Tourism Rehavam Ze'evi

▸**The PFLP in the northern Gaza Strip held a rally marking the anniversary of the assassination of Israeli Minister of Tourism Rehavam Ze'evi**.[3] A speech was given warning Israel and its prison services not to let any harm come to Maher al-Akhras, and not to

[3] Rehavam Ze'evi was assassinated by three PFLP terrorist operatives in Jerusalem on October 17, 2001.

continue the solitary confinement of senior PFLP terrorist Wa'el al-Jaghoub. According to the speech, PFLP operatives were waiting impatiently for orders from headquarters to turn the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip into "dust" as a first response to the prisoners' continued suffering. The speaker expressed pride that they were part of the "resistance axis" in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Iran, and thanked all those who supported the "Palestinian resistance" with money, weapons and military knowhow, especially Iran and

From the ceremony marking the anniversary of the assassination of Rehavam Ze'evi. Right: Hezbollah and Iranian flags stuck in an effigy of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Left: Headless effigy laid on a coffin bearing a picture of Rehavam Ze'evi (Bowabat al-Hadaf, October 17, 2020).

According to reports, the Wadia Hadad Squads (a network of PFLP balloon-launchers) launched a cluster of IED balloons with pictures of Wa'el al-Jaghoub and warnings that the continued suffering of Maher al-Akhras and Wa'el al-Jaghoub would bring death and destruction to Israel (Facebook page of the Handele Center for Prisoners and Released Prisoners, October 17, 2020). In effect, no IED balloons were identified in Israel territory.

Launching IED balloons (Bowabat al-Hadaf, October 17, 2020).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

The internal Palestinian reconciliation

▶**Despite the meetings and contacts held by Fatah, Hamas and the other Palestinian organizations, no final date has been set for the meeting of their leaderships, which was supposed to be held at the beginning of October** (after which an edict would be issued determining the date of elections to various PA institutions). According to Palestinian sources, the delay is the result of what they refer to as "technical differences of opinion" (al-Quds al-Arabi, October 12, 2020).

▶Despite the delay, **Jibril Rajoub**, secretary of Fatah's Central Committee and the moving spirit behind the attempts at reconciliation, is trying to present an appearance of agreement between the sides. Interviewed by Palestinian TV, he said that during a meeting of Fatah and Hamas representatives in Turkey **a document of understandings was composed** whose main points were the following (Palestinian TV, October 14, 2020).

- ◆Elections will be held according to proportional representation. All stages of the elections will be completed within six months. After the elections a national unity government will be formed with the participation of all the Palestinian organizations.
- ◆A national discourse will be held directly with the Palestinian organizations and a meeting of the organizations' leaderships will be held within a week, chaired by Mahmoud Abbas.
- ◆A "presidential edict" will be issued regarding the reconciliation, after which the discourse between Fatah and Hamas will be completed.
- ◆**A united leadership will be formed for the "popular resistance" to be active and have a presence in the West Bank and abroad**. Jibril Rajoub noted that while they referred to the "popular resistance," **the Palestinians reserved the right to use all means at their disposal for the "struggle" [against Israel] as long as the rules of confrontation were determined by general agreement** and in a way that would preserve international support for the Palestinians.

▶During an interview Saleh al-'Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, called for **joint Fatah-Hamas activity in the Gaza Strip and West Bank**. He noted that during the first and second intifadas Fatah and Hamas fought together [against Israel] (al-Aqsa, October 16, 2020).

Palestinian daily newspapers again delivered to the Gaza Strip

▶Salama Maarouf, head of the PA government information office, announced that as of October 15, 2020, they had decided that **daily newspapers published in the PA would again be delivered to the Gaza Strip, entering through the Erez Crossing**. The Hamas bureau of information reported that the decision came after the governmental information bureau recommended the issue be reexamined in light of developments in Covid-19 infection (website of the governmental information bureau on Gaza, October 14, 2020). In reality it is apparently a result of the lowering of tensions (at least publicly) between Hamas in Gaza and Fatah and the PA.

Palestinian responses to Israeli examination of UNRWA school curriculums

▶Gilad Erdan, the Israeli ambassador to the UN, petitioned Philippe Lazzarini, the UNRWA representative, with a demand that the agency remove anti-Israel incitement and anti-Semitic material from the curriculums of its schools in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria. He also demanded that UNRWA publicly commit to expelling all terrorist networks located in its buildings (Twitter account of Gilad Erdan, October 12, 2020). The Israeli media reported that in response Lazzarini promised an examination of UNRWA textbooks and the syllabuses taught in its schools to see if they contained incitement against Israel, and said a report would be presented to the agency heads, along with recommendations (Israel HaYom, October 13, 2020).

▶Insofar as is known to the ITIC, so far **the PA has not formally addressed the issue**. However, two responses from Palestinian organizations were the following:

- **Dr. Atef Abu Hamada, a member of the executive office of the popular committees for refugees in the Gaza Strip** [subordinate to the PLO], said in response that UNRWA uses Palestinian crises to promote Zionist policies. He added that the head of UNRWA should examine Zionist teaching materials and not only those of the Palestinians to see which contained incitement. He also said that the Palestinian curriculums, at every stage, called for adherence to Arab and Islamic rights, principles and values, and **contained neither incitement nor terrorism. Israel, he said, was established on a foundation of illusions and myths, and UNRWA wanted to turn the myths into fact**. He added that UNRWA had no right to interfere in curriculums and

that its work was limited to providing welfare [for Palestinian refugees] (Palestine Online, October 17, 2020).

◆**The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)** department for UNRWA affairs expressed surprise at the statements attributed to Lazzarini by the Israeli media. According to the DFLP, UNRWA's curriculums were examined more than once by a number of UN agencies, especially UNESCO, and meetings had been held to discuss them, the most important of which was in Amman on November 23-25, 2016. **Agreement had been universally reached that UNRWA's curriculums followed the curriculums of the PA and the Arab states hosting Palestinian refugees**. UNRWA's curriculums, said the DFLP, reflect UN values and support the development of the students' fundamental capabilities and talents, and therefore were "free of any incitement and established a love of knowledge, life and creativity, and did not, as the Israeli occupation claimed, contain incitement." **The DFLP called on UNRWA and its donor states to reject Israel's position regarding a change in UNRWA's curriculums** (qudsnet.com, October 15, 2020).[4]

Palestinian reactions to the authorization of Israel's construction plans in Judea and Samaria

▶On October 15, 2020, the planning council of Israel's civilian authority authorized a program for the construction of more than two thousand residential units in the Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria. It was met with strong reactions from the PA, which connected the authorization to Israel's signing the agreement with Bahrain. Some of the reactions were the following:

◆**Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas**, condemned the plans for new construction (Palestinian TV, October 14, 2020). He also thanked Germany, Britain, Italy, France and Spain for condemning Israel's plan to construct thousands of new residential units in the West Bank (Wafa, October 16, 2020).

◆At the beginning of the weekly government meeting**, PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh said by signing the agreement with Israel, Bahrain gave Israel a "present" and increased Israel's "appetite" for extending construction in the settlements**. He said it weakened the Palestinians' efforts to establish an independent

[4] For the contents of the textbooks used by UNRWA schools in the PA see the ITIC studies dealing with the issue.

state. He thanked the five European countries that had condemned Israel for its intention to build in the settlements (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, October 19, 2020).

◆**Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian delegate to the UN**, sent memoranda to the UN secretary general, the president of the UN Security Council and the president of the UN General Assembly. He claimed Israel was exploiting the Covid-19 pandemic to promote the annexation [of territories in Judea and Samaria] and the settlements (Dunia al-Watan, October 15, 2020).

◆**Muhammad Shalaldeh, PA minister of justice**, said that in the coming days Palestinian judges would discuss cases relating to the "violations" carried out by the settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank. He said Palestinian courts would examine the possibility of publicizing their decisions and orders against the settlers. He said that if Israel did not honor the decisions and orders that would serve as proof to international judges of criminal activity (Sawa, October 14, 2020).

UAE delegation expelled from the Temple Mount

▸**A delegation from the UAE which went to the Temple Mount to pray at al-Aqsa mosque was shamed and expelled**. A video of the event showed residents of east Jerusalem chasing the group of four UAE citizens from the Temple Mount while shouting insults at them. The four, who demonstrated restraint, left the area (al-Jazeera, October 18, 2020). Hamas media reported that the four had gone to pray accompanied by Israeli security forces and were "requested" to leave by local Palestinian religious activists, who shouted curses and chanted slogans against normalization [of relations with Israel] (Palinfo, October 18, 2020).

From a video documenting the expulsion of UAE worshippers from the Temple Mount (Palinfo, October 18, 2020)

▸**PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** said entering al-Aqsa mosque had to be through a gate of the owners of the site [i.e., the Palestinians] and not with the "occupation" [i.e., Israel] (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, October 19, 2020). **Note**: Immediately after the declaration of an agreement between Israel and the UAE the Palestinians announced that if, following the agreement, UAE residents came to pray at al-Aqsa mosque, they would be expelled.

▸**Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, chairman of the Islamic authority in Jerusalem**, called normalization a sin, and everything arising from it was null and void. He said the entrance of Muslims into al-Aqsa mosque under the protection of Israel ("the occupation") was painful and forbidden (website of al-Quds al-Yawm TV, October 19, 2020). **Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the Mufti of Jerusalem**, said praying on the Temple Mount was permitted only to those who entered through lawful gates and not those of the "occupation." He said that visiting the Temple Mount with the sponsorship of the "deal of the century" and normalization of relations with Israel was completely forbidden (al-Andalou News, October 19, 2020).

Diplomatic and media activity for the release of Maher al-Akhras

▸PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh met in Ramallah with consuls and representatives of the EU, where he condemned Israel's human rights behavior, using as an example Israel's "treatment" of hunger-striking terrorist prisoner Maher al-Akhras. He called his imprisonment "illegal" (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, October 13, 2020).

▸On October 15, 2020, Mai al-Kayla, PA minister of health, held a joint press conference in Ramallah with Qudri Abu Bakr, chairman of the authority of prisoners and released prisoners' affairs, and Qadoura Fares, chairman of the Palestinian prisoners' club. She warned of the seriousness of Maher al-Akhras' condition and called on international organization to intervene for his release (Facebook page of the ministry of health in Ramallah, October 15, 2020).

Right: Palestinian minister of health holds a press conference to call for the release of Maher al-Akhras (Facebook page of the ministry of health in Ramallah, October 15, 2020). Left: Muhammad Shtayyeh meets with consuls and EU representatives (Facebook page of Muhammad Shtayyeh, October 13, 2020).

- In Judea and Samaria rallies continued for his release, held in Hebron, Bethlehem and Tubas (Wafa, October 14 and 18, 2020).

Demonstration in Bethlehem for the release of Maher al-Akhras, Wafa, October 14, 2020).