

Arab Village in Israel Targeted in Racial Attack

Vandals daubed "Arabs out" graffiti and punctured tires in an Arab village near Jerusalem on Tuesday, targeting a community widely seen in Israel as a showcase for Jewish-Arab coexistence.

Unlike similar attacks that have damaged Arab mosques, homes, vehicles and olive groves, the vandalism took place in an Arab village in Israel popular with Jewish visitors, rather than in a Palestinian community in the occupied West Bank.

Abu Ghosh, where the tires of 28 cars were punctured and anti-Arab slogans scrawled on walls, is located along the main Tel Aviv-Jerusalem highway and is well liked among Jewish visitors for its Middle Eastern restaurants.

"In this village ... Arabs and Jews live a normal life," said Jawadat Ibrahim, an Abu Ghosh resident who owns a restaurant in the village.

He said he suspected Jewish militants were behind the incident, although the "Price Tag" slogans left behind by ultranationalists who have vandalized Palestinian property in the West Bank were not found in Abu Ghosh.

The term refers to the "price" militants say they will exact for Palestinian attacks against Israelis or attempts by the Israeli government to curb settlement building in the West Bank.

Condemning the Abu Ghosh attack, Economy Minister Naftali Bennett of the pro-settler Jewish Home party said on his Facebook page: "There is a small group of evil-doers who want to destroy any chance of good neighborly relations between Arabs and Jews in our country ... we will not let them succeed."

Police said they had opened an investigation into the incident, which occurred just two days after Israel's security cabinet approved new measures to designate "Price Tag" vandals as members of "illicit organizations".

An Israeli official said the decision would bring Israel's handling of "Price Tag" suspects more into line with its crackdowns on Palestinian militants, with longer detentions and jail sentences as well as more intrusive surveillance and interrogation.

(Editing by Raissa Kasolowsky)

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