

Stone-Throwing Attacks on Jews in East Jerusalem Intensifies

The Knesset's Internal Affairs and Environment Committee held a special session Wednesday on the rise in the number of stone-throwing attacks against Jews in east Jerusalem.

According to police data, such incidents have become a daily occurrence in the area and have recently escalated to include Molotov cocktails.

Yitzhak Lehrer, who heads the Housing Ministry's security division, briefed the committee on the "geographic expansion of stone-throwing incidents throughout the east Jerusalem sector." He stressed that while the ministry's security officers help extract any casualties in such incidents, the Jerusalem Police was in charge of enforcing the law.

Committee Chairwoman MK Miri Regev (Likud), requested information about the number of arrests in such cases and the punitive action taken against those arrested. Maj. Gen. Kobi Dudian of the Jerusalem District Police said that 207 perpetrators have been arrested in 2013, the majority of whom were minors, and that only 47 of them were detained pending the conclusion of the legal proceedings against them.

He noted that the number of cases involving stone and firebomb throwing has spiked by dozens of percentage points since November 2012's Operation Pillar of Defense, but noted that in recent weeks, the number of firebomb incidents has been steadily declining, which he attributed to the arrest of several terror cells which orchestrated the violent attacks.

Attorney Nurit Blumstein of the Jerusalem District Prosecution briefed the committee on the punitive measures detailed in the

Israeli law, saying that in some cases, such as those involving hurling stone at cars travelling on east Jerusalem's roads, the offense is punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

According to Blumstein offenses involving firebombs are punishable by 14-20 years in prison, while throwing stones at police officers, which is classified as assault on a member of the Israeli security forces, is punishable by a five-year prison term.

She stressed that the prosecution always requests that suspects arrested in connection to such cases be remanded for the duration of the proceedings, and that it appeals all rulings to the contrary.

Regev pressed law enforcement officials as to why only 47 of suspects were incarcerated for the duration of their court proceedings. She was told that judges consider various factors and had sole discretion over their rulings.

Elisha Peleg, who is in charge of security coordination on behalf of the Jerusalem municipality, said "the Jewish residents are denied security in east Jerusalem." He noted that virtually all Jewish neighborhoods in east Jerusalem have been adversely affected by Israel's lax enforcement, saying this includes harassment of Jewish girls by Arabs. "The Arabs want to divide Jerusalem and have resorted to illegal action because of the approaching diplomatic talks."

Hardliner legislator MK Moshe Feiglin said that the heart of the problem lies in Israel's reluctance to assert its sovereignty over the Temple Mount, quoting a famous songwriter.

MK Moti Yogev (Habayit Hayehudi) said that he has felt the rise of violence in east Jerusalem first hand. He asked the police whether they are reassessing the situation and whether they would consider reinforcing the area with armed officers who would enforce the law more aggressively. He suggested that

the State Prosecution ask that the courts to apply the maximum sentence on offenders.

MK Israel Eichler [UTJ] mentioned that on Tuesday night a funeral took place on the Mount of Olives during which stones were thrown at the mourners. "The state is not sending the message that it wants to control east Jerusalem," he said.

MK Talab Abu Arar (Ra'am-Ta'al) said he would like to see a discussion as well of Jewish stone throwers, because there has been a drastic spike in violence between Jews and Arabs. He called on everyone to join forces to eliminate violence.

Summing up the discussion, MK Miri Regev (Likud) said that "the Temple Mount and Jerusalem are in our hands and we must ensure the security of both Jews and Arabs in these places." She said that enforcement was not keeping up with the level of violence being committed and said she would write to the state attorney concerning this matter.

She asked the state attorney to present a plan for dealing with children under the age of 16 who throw stones. "We can't let them continue. Stones kill," she said. She recommended that police deploy differently at sensitive roads and junctures, as they have been asked to do in Judea and Samaria. There will be a follow-up hearing in a month, Regev said.

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