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Unarmed Civilian Protection in Palestine

**An Evaluation of a Six-Month Pilot Project
in Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja, West Bank, Palestine**

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Creating Safer Space

Creating Safer Space is an international research and impact collaboration, which aims to understand and support unarmed civilian protection (UCP) and self-protection in the midst of violent conflict. It supports research that explores how violence against civilians can be deterred or prevented by civilians without the use or threat of force.

The Network brings together conflict-affected communities, protection practitioners, academics, policymakers, and artists to jointly work on the vision of enhancing unarmed protection practices, which create safer space for communities and individuals amidst violent conflict, raise their levels of resilience and help prevent displacement.

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For further information on the work of the Network, please visit our website: <https://creating-safer-space.com>

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Executive Summary

This evaluation report presents the findings of a two-pronged study conducted with the community of Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja in the South Jordan Valley of the West Bank. Using a participatory evaluation method to determine the effectiveness of unarmed civilian protection, and utilizing a case study methodology to describe the nature and quantity of settler violence in the community, **this evaluation makes the following conclusions:**

1. The level of violence experienced by the community of Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja is worse than reported by other sources in the West Bank, in terms of frequency and severity.
2. The lack of meaningful response from law enforcement confirms other reports that the level of impunity has reached a crisis level.
3. While the community of Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja managed to remain in their community for the duration of the six-month pilot project, the community was forcibly displaced in the month proceeding the end of the project. Despite this, two focus groups of displaced members demonstrated that community members still strongly believed in the effectiveness of unarmed civilian protection (UCP) in general. However, more research and planning are needed to ensure UCP continues to adapt to the changing landscape of violence and impunity in the West Bank.
4. Social media and organized international solidarity efforts are an important component of UCP and contribute to building awareness of the severity of settler violence against Palestinian civilians.

Based on these conclusions, **this evaluation offers the following recommendations:**

1. An urgent and sustained UCP intervention is required in the West Bank, which includes highly skilled practitioners, with an increase in number and geographical presence.
2. UCP practitioners utilize a wide variety of skills and tactics, emphasizing the importance of advanced skills and training for UCP practitioners.
3. More planning and research are needed to respond to the new and critical reality of unprecedented impunity which continues to challenge conventional UCP practices.

About the authors

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About UCP in Palestine (UCPiP)



Unarmed Civilian Protection in Palestine (UCPiP) is an initiative responding to an urgent call from Palestinian communities for safety, international presence and protection from genocide. Grounded in a feasibility assessment conducted in July 2024, UCPiP works to protect civilians in Palestine through nonviolence, accompaniment, and global advocacy. This report evaluates UCPiP's pilot project in the southern Jordan Valley of the occupied West Bank, which aimed to deter violence, support local resilience, and build a network of international allies committed to justice.

For more information, see: <https://www.ucpip.org>

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Introduction

From July to December 2025, Unarmed Civilian Protection in Palestine (UCPiP), a Palestinian-led organization with participation of international experts, implemented a six-month pilot project in the south Jericho Valley of the West Bank of Palestine. The purpose of this project was to respond to the security needs of a vulnerable Palestinian community (Ras 'Ein al 'Auja) by deploying an international team of professionals to provide protective presence. In the context of worsening violence perpetrated by residents of nearby illegal Israeli settlements, the project included an evaluative component to better understand the nature and severity of the settler violence, and to evaluate the effectiveness of unarmed civilian protection (UCP) in this new and more challenging post-October 7th context.

Context

Although UCP organizations have been working in the West Bank since 1995 (Community Peacemaker Teams, n.d.), there is widespread agreement that two factors have led to a worsening environment for providing protective presence since October 7, 2023: increasing settler violence and growing support for the settler perpetrators by the Israeli state apparatus (B'Tselem, 2026).

The United Nations reported that the 2025 Palestinian olive harvest was met with the highest levels of settler violence on record (United Nations, 2025a) and has calculated that for 2025, there have been an average of five attacks by settlers against Palestinian civilians per day in the West Bank (United Nations, 2025b). This increase in settler violence has been acknowledged by the Israeli government (Ashkenazi and Barsky,

2025), but this has not resulted in any meaningful policy changes to address it.

The violence included an increase in attacks on international volunteers who have come to the West Bank to offer protective presence (UCPiP, 2024), including at least one death.

In this context, there has been a conscious recognition that UCP programs need to reflect on their purpose, practices and effectiveness. Thus, UCPiP decided to initiate their work with a small-scale pilot project that included an evaluative component, and to prepare by forging partnerships with local communities to create effective, community-centered, nonviolent ways for civilians to prevent violence in their communities.

UCP and Theory of Change

How does unarmed civilian protection (UCP), also referred as protective presence, work to reduce violence and create safer space for Palestinians? UCP is not unique to the West Bank, and organizations have been deployed to dozens of regions throughout the world, where volatile conditions threaten civilian populations with violence. Under the guidance of international law, and working with the principle of nonviolence, UCP teams respond to invitations from local communities, and utilize strategic actions under their direction and leadership to create safer spaces in contexts such as civil wars, fragile cease-fires, widespread urban gang violence, and one-sided violence targeting human rights defenders.

There have been numerous studies to determine that UCP programs have reduced violence and even saved lives (Julian, 2024; McCarthy, 2023) and allowed civilians to engage more actively in basic activities such as attending school, engaging in farming and herding, accessing health care and freedom of movement. For example, in large urban areas, unarmed groups have organized to interrupt gang violence, reducing homicide rates by up to 93 percent in 2015 (Ransford et al, 2017, p 185). In the West Bank, evidence suggests that Palestinian communities feel safer when teams of international accompaniers are present (UCPiP, 2024). UCP is suggested to reduce violence for several reasons. Firstly, the premise is that people, including perpetrators of violence, behave better when they are being monitored, and when

there is the possibility of consequences for their behavior. Secondly, in comparison to armed peacekeepers, such as United Nations peacekeeping forces, utilizing unarmed civilians legitimizes other forms of influence beside the use (or threat of use) of violence.

The skills and tactics used by UCP teams include the following: physical presence, physical accompaniment, advocacy, observing, reporting, capacity development, and building local, regional and international support networks (Schweitzer, 2023).

UCP groups operating in the West Bank, however, have expressed concern that since October 7, 2023, the effectiveness of UCP strategies has been under threat. As mentioned in the previous section, an unprecedented era of impunity has evolved in the West Bank, thereby challenging one of the core aspects of why UCP effects positive change in the form of violence reduction.



Description of UCP Deployment in Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja

During the spring of 2025, the UCPIP team met with groups throughout the West Bank to determine the most viable location to deploy their team and launch a six-month pilot project. It became evident that the demand for UCP teams was greater than the supply, so the UCPIP project engaged in a discernment process to determine which community invitation they would respond to. In the end, the small Bedouin community of Al Muarrajat, located in the South Jordan Valley near the city of Jericho, was chosen. A feasibility assessment was completed, and a plan was made to recruit and deploy a team

of six UCP practitioners to start in June 2025. However, due to the breakout of war between Israel and Iran that month, the airspace closed, and the international team was unable to come. Tragically, by the time the airspace was open again a few weeks later, the community of Al Muarrajat had been forcibly displaced due to the ongoing settler violence. Immediately, the neighboring Bedouin village of Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja requested that UCPIP deploy its international team in their community, and in July 2025, a team of 6 practitioners arrived to initiate the UCPIP pilot project.

Methodology

This evaluation is comprised of two main methodologies: a case study methodology to describe the nature of the violent attacks on Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja, and a community participatory methodology to develop authentic indicators on which to measure the project’s effectiveness in meeting its goals. The following is a list of specific research questions that guided the evaluation component of UCPIP’s six-month pilot project:

- 1) What does settler violence look like?
- 2) What strategies were utilized by the UCP team in Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja to reduce

the impact of this violence?

- 3) Did the deployment of the UCP team to Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja meet the community’s goal to reduce violence?

Additional components of this evaluation included a) a brief self-reflection by UCP team members on the effectiveness of their strategies and b) a description of two main strategies for reporting and information dissemination: a dedicated social media campaign, and the development of an international solidarity network devoted specifically to the community of Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja.

Based on the above foci, the following methodologies were developed:

- 1) An incident report form was developed to chronicle the details of every attack on the community of Ras 'Ein al 'Auja, during the 6-month pilot project, July to December 2025. The report form captured details such as nature of attack, length, description of perpetrators, interventions carried out by the UCP team, and outcomes. The outcome of this methodology was a detailed and accurate description of the nature of settler attacks for a specific community in the West Bank.
- 2) A survey was conducted for team members to reflect on their practice to provide ideas on what worked well and what could be improved. The written survey was given to the 13 UCP practitioners who served on the two teams (each one lasting three months) of the pilot project. Additionally, two one-on-one interviews were conducted with team members, to account for the low return rate of the surveys.
- 3) A participatory evaluation process was developed to evaluate whether the deployment of a UCP team was effective in reducing the violence perpetrated by surrounding Israeli settlements. The first step in this process was to engage the community members of Ras 'Ein al 'Auja (and also Al Muarrajat) to better understand the community's perceptions of international protective presence, and to better understand the goals of the community. To this end, two Palestinian facilitators commissioned a community consultation process and met separately with men and women (31 participants in total). The result of this process was the development of the following list of measurable

indicators that were used at the mid and end point of the pilot project, to evaluate whether the project met the community-identified goals.

- Ability to access health care, schools, markets
- Restriction of movement in general
- Safety at night
- Impact on children's education
- Impact on youth, and their level of community engagement
- Impact on youth expressing feelings
- Impact on families being able to remain together
- Ability to keep families safe

Interviews were transcribed and then a thematic analysis was used to identify themes in the data.

- 4) Basic descriptive statistics were gathered to illustrate the breadth of two components of the pilot project that were aimed at disseminating information and creating an advocacy mechanism for the duration of the pilot project. These two components were: a social media campaign and an international solidarity network.

Ethical considerations, such as consent, confidentiality and security of data were addressed as follows: community residents who participated in the community forums were informed of the nature of the study and the potential risks and benefits. All information collected was anonymous and participation was voluntary. Incident report data was collected and stored electronically in a secure online database, and no identifying data was included. Only adults were included in groups, and men and women met separately at the request of the community.

Results

1. *What does settler violence look like?*

The following table quantifies the types of attacks on the community of Ras Al Auja from October 17 to December 21, 2025, a total of 66 days. The window of data used was condensed based on optimizing data which was most complete.

The total number of attacks during this period was 98, or a mean average of 1.5

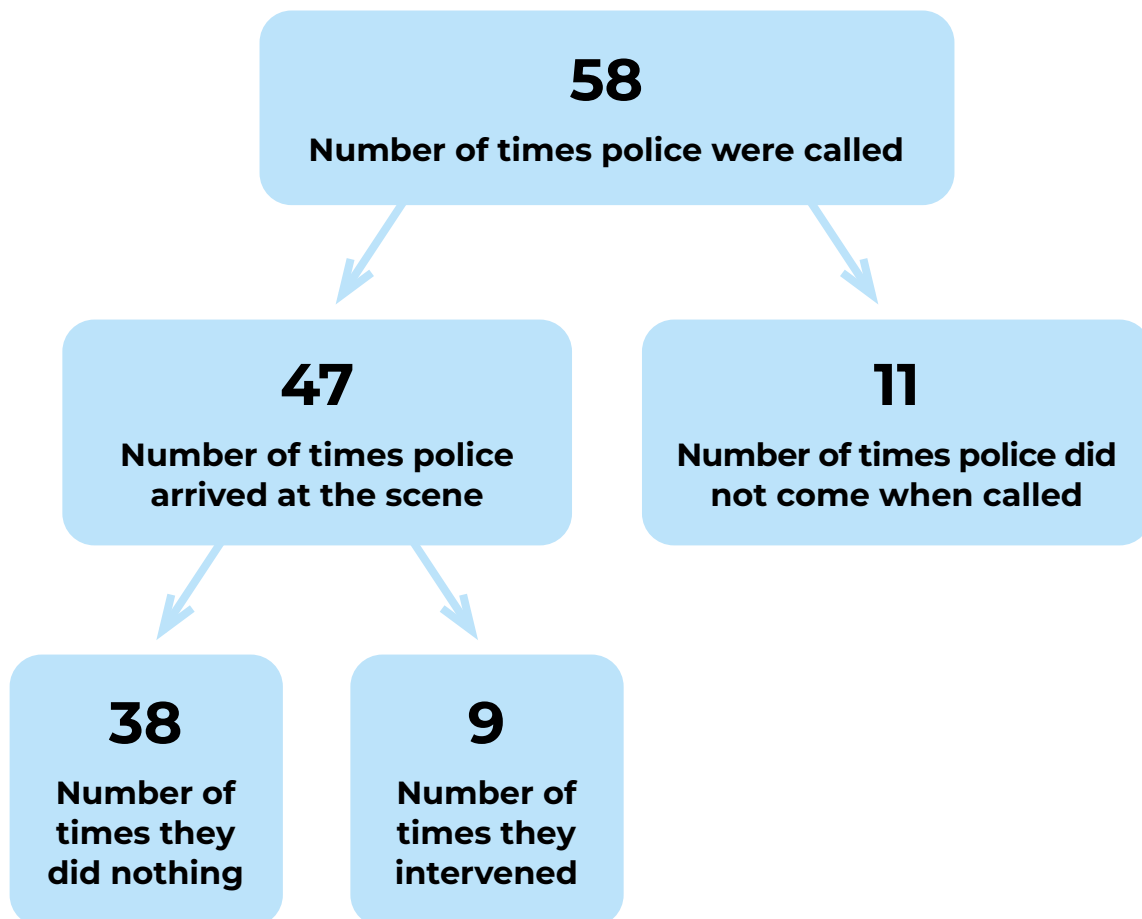
incidents per day. With regards to the description of settler violence, this pilot project was able to collect rigorous data that covered 66 days, 24 hours per day. The results demonstrate the pervasive level of violence that Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja faced. Of the 66 days of data collection there were only 6 days in which there were no attacks, thus the daily attack rate was 91 percent.

Description of Incident	Number of Occurrences
Trespassing (including bringing livestock onto Palestinian land)	90
Physical Assault (including UCP practitioners and community members)	48
Property damage	22
Theft of Property	9
Theft of Livestock	6
Verbal Threats	2
Injury of livestock	1

Of the physical assaults, there were 2 hospitalizations with full recovery, and no deaths reported.

The following graphic quantifies the

number of times the UCP team called the police in order to intervene in the unlawful attacks by the settler groups. For the 98 settler attacks, the police were called 58 times.



This graphic shows that for 58 calls to police, there was meaningful intervention only nine times, or in 16 percent of calls. Meaningful intervention typically looked like the police responding to a call by coming to the scene, and asking settlers to leave, and remaining at the scene until the settlers left.

For the remaining 84 percent of calls, police either did not respond, or arrived and did nothing to address the violence. In some cases, police arrived and antagonized the UCP team or community members instead of stopping the settler violence.

2. *What strategies were utilized by UCP team in Ras Ein al Auja in order to reduce the impact of the violence?*

The following table quantifies the skills that the UCP team used to respond to the 98 documented incidents in Ras Ein al Auja, from October 17 to December 21:

Feedback from UCP practitioners stated that the most important skills were monitoring, de-escalation, interpositioning, relationship building and reporting. Accompaniment was not asked for as the community deemed it was too dangerous to bring their flocks out, and training was not really incorporated to a great degree. Additionally, rapid response was deemed essential, as was a 24/7 presence, particularly night-time patrol.

UCP skill	Number of times utilized
Relationship building	64
Monitoring	63
Reporting	62
De-escalating	58
Interpositioning	57
Accompanying	23
Training	8

3. *Did the deployment of the UCP team to Ras Ein al Auja meet the community's goal to reduce violence?*

During the first consultation, held in June 2025, two groups of men and women separately were organized. This turned into an opportunity for community members to share their history of loss, their collective trauma. It also provided an opportunity for them to learn about UCPIP and the pilot project. Finally, they developed a list of criteria by which to determine whether UCPIP had met the community's goals for them being there (presented in the Methodology section).

The second consultation occurred on October 13, approximately halfway through the six-month period, and again, the discussion reflected the community's strong desire to talk about their conditions. There was considerable discussion on the nature of attacks and the impact on their community. The results were collated into the following themes:

- There was improved access to health, school and markets, and freedom of movement.
- The project provided partial, but not complete relief of challenges.

- Safety at night was still an issue. No one felt safe at night, even with the UCPiP presence.
- There was evidence of emotional wellbeing among the school-aged children and stability in school attendance.
- Unrelated to safety and security, several people saw the UCPiP team there as an opportunity for their children to learn English, at least key words and phrases.
- Presence of UCPiP meant better community cohesion, benefits for youth.
- An impediment to feeling safe was chronic fear and trauma.
- Trauma remained untreated.
- One respondent thought there would be no improvement in youth expressing their feelings, while another respondent thought there would be an improvement.
- The community felt safer.
- They stayed on their land longer than they would have otherwise.
- When they did choose to leave, they reported that they did not feel abandoned. They felt that the team accompanied them, and that their story was heard around the world, due to their reporting and information dissemination.
- The children felt safer going to school.
- Documentation was important, as community members stated they did not feel safe documenting.
- Specific skills such as interpositioning and protective presence (simply being in the community 24/7).

4. What can a dedicated social media campaign accomplish?

An important component of the UCPiP pilot project was the development of tools to amplify the voice of the people of Ras 'Ein al 'Auja, and to disseminate information regarding the violence enacted upon them. During the six-month pilot project period, an intensive social media campaign was carried out. Additionally, a solidarity network was created, which recruited supporters from a number of countries (primarily the United States and Canada) to engage directly with the people of Ras 'Ein al 'Auja. A major component of the solidarity network were the monthly Zoom calls, where community members spoke directly to network members, sharing aspects of their daily lives and the challenges of living under the continuous threat of forced displacement. Members of the solidarity network also connected with UCP personnel, who shared their

The third consultation occurred on February 18, 2026. The final consultation was planned to occur in January. However, due to the increased violence and subsequent forced displacement, the consultation did not occur. The consultation that occurred on February 18 was smaller than planned, due to the fact that the community members were scattered, and the difficulty and logistics of gathering people together. There were two groups consulted – one male and one female (total number equals 8).

An analysis of the notes of these meetings produced the following themes.

- The UCP team had a positive presence in the community, as evidenced by the following:

experiences. Monthly Zoom calls attracted up to 70 supporters per call.

It is difficult to measure the impact of social media, but one way in which this can be done is to describe the breadth of media coverage. In January 2026, when Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja was forcibly displaced, the event was covered by many of the largest global media services, including CNN, The Guardian, Al Jazeera and DW. The event was also covered in mainstream Israeli media, including reports in the Jerusalem Post and The Times of Israel. During the final focus groups with the community,

members reported that they believe this was directly related to the wide reach of UCPiP’s advocacy efforts through social media and the solidarity network.

Additionally, UCPiP’s Instagram had over 106,000 followers. Individual posts had been viewed by as many as 8.1 million viewers. The impact of the social media campaign was acknowledged by the community members who, during the final meeting, stated that they felt people around the world were watching them, which they credited to the social media efforts of UCPiP.

Discussion

The purpose of this evaluation was multifaceted: to gather data on settler attacks on a specific Palestinian community in order to better understand the nature of the violence, and to evaluate the pilot project to make a more informed decision as to whether UCP was still an effective mechanism to respond to settler violence against Palestinian communities in the West Bank. The following discussion focusses on four main conclusions.

1. *The UCP team in Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja records levels of settler violence worse than reported by other sources.*

Prior to the implementation of UCPiP’s pilot project, the planning team met with many communities to better understand the violence they were facing. Typical responses from community members were: they attack us every day, or the violence is non-stop. The data collected in this evaluation confirms the pervasive but anecdotal reports from communities throughout the West Bank. For the 66 days of continuous data, there were 98 separate attacks from Israeli settlers, which

gives a mean daily rate of 1.5 attacks per day. During the 66 days, there were only 6 days during which no attack was recorded, which means there was a 91 percent chance of a settler attack on any given day.

A United Nations report from the end of 2025 states that across the entire West Bank, there was an average of five attacks per day (2025b). Considering our data records 1.5 attacks per day for just one community with a population of less than 1000, one might consider that the United Nations data offers a significant underestimation. It is unclear whether the definitions of attack differ between the two groups of data; nonetheless, it would

not be surprising to consider that attacks in general are underreported to official agencies, and that our data collection methodology may offer a more accurate picture into the severity of the incidence of settler attacks.

2. *Police response rates demonstrate a culture of impunity.*

The data collected on law enforcement responses to settler attacks demonstrate that only 16 percent of calls to police resulted in helpful intervention. Such a low response rate provides confirming data to the belief that settlers attack Palestinian civilians in a culture of impunity. This highlights the need for focusing on this, meaning involvement of entities who are able to put pressure on the government of Israel.

3. *UCP personnel use a wide range of skills to reduce violence.*

The data show that a wide range of UCP skills are used, many of them almost daily. This demonstrates the level of skill needed by UCP personnel, and thus supports the need for personnel with experience, and who have been well-trained. It also supports longer-term personnel, as skills are consolidated the longer the deployment lasts.

4. *The question of success is a complicated one.*

On a nominal level, UCPiP's six-month pilot project to provide protective presence in the Palestinian community of Ras 'Ein al 'Auja met its fundamental goal in that the community was not forcibly displaced during this time. However, this conclusion becomes problematic by the fact that in the first month following the end of the evaluation period, the community was, in fact, forcibly displaced. One conclusion

that might be drawn is that the UCP team's presence delayed the displacement, allowing the residents extra time. However, even this conclusion may be problematic if one critically asks what the advantage is of spending a few extra months, if the final outcome is the same. It might be reasonable to conclude as well that UCP in the West Bank is successful in slowing down the ethnic cleansing, and provides support to families and communities, while making the world aware of their plight. For this last point, success may still be relevant, but not measurable in the short term. It may be that the high profile of these forced disappearances will slowly but steadfastly rally global support, and change may come, but slowly. Thus, there may, in fact, be positive change that this report is unable to measure in the short term.

This pilot project, with its added components of a highly organized social media awareness campaign coupled with an active solidarity network, may contribute in the long term, while still being unable to fully prevent the violence that leads to forced displacement and ethnic cleansing in the short term.

Regardless of the tragedy of the eventual displacement of Ras 'Ein al 'Auja, the feedback from former community members, gathered a month after the occurrence, supported the notion that the UCP presence in Ras 'Ein al 'Auja had a direct and positive effect on the community's identified safety and security priorities. Overall, the feedback from the community members was almost unanimous – the UCP team made a difference. They felt safer, they were able to conduct their lives more normally, and they were able to stay on their land longer than if the accompaniers had not been present. Their main piece of

advice was that more UCP personnel need to be deployed in communities like theirs, in order to reduce the likelihood of forced displacement in the future.

There are several limitations of this study which need to be highlighted. First of all, because of the qualitative nature of a case study, the results of Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja cannot be generalized to other contexts in the West Bank. Further research is necessary to continue to study UCP best practices in the context of settler violence in the West Bank, and the nature of the Israeli state’s

role in fostering impunity of violence against civilians.

Additionally, the qualitative nature of this study may invite researcher bias in data collection, but this was mitigated by having only one person conduct all the data collection for the incidents of violence. Finally, the focus groups of community members and UCP personnel were small in size and there is the possibility that they did not represent all of the perspectives and opinions of the members of the groups they represented.

Conclusion

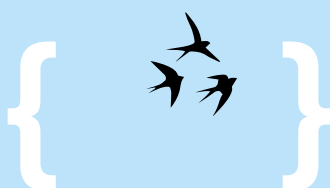
In conclusion, the main goal of this evaluation was to determine if deploying a team of UCP practitioners to a Palestinian community would improve safety, as defined by the community. The results of the evaluation demonstrate the conditions in the West Bank in which UCPIP was deployed are extremely challenging, but nonetheless, feedback from members of the Ras ‘Ein al ‘Auja community demonstrate that their presence was effective in making them feel safe, disseminating their situation to the international media, and allowing them to stay on their land longer than if the accompaniers had not been there. Thus, a primary recommendation of this evaluation is that UCPIP should continue. Other recommendations include deploying teams that are highly skilled and well trained, and increasing the number of UCP practitioners being deployed to the West Bank. Based on the scope and

breadth of the work of the project’s social media campaign and solidarity network, it is recommended that advocacy and information dissemination continue to be an important priority for long term goals of addressing settler violence against Palestinian civilians.



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