

*Charlie Cooper*  
**2359 Nutmeg Terrace**  
**Baltimore, MD 21209**

March 6, 2024

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1124**

**Civil Actions - Nonprofit Organizations - Unauthorized Support of Israeli Settlement Activity (Not on Our Dime Act)**

I come from a family of Jewish heritage and was a Zionist in my youth. Over the years, I have become more concerned about the fate of Palestinians under Israeli occupation for more than five decades. The bill before you complements and builds on actions already taken by the Federal government.

For decades, Israel has been violating international law by expropriating land from occupied Palestine and building Jewish settlements. Recently, there has been a seriously increase in activity whereby settlers destroy trees, block Palestinians' access to their agricultural lands, harass and/or commit violence against Palestinians in the Palestinians' villages and towns. Israeli police and military troops often witness this activity but only very rarely move to protect innocent Palestinians.

In February of this year, the U.S. government joined the British and French governments in initiating sanctions against four Israeli settlers who committed violence against Palestinians.<sup>1</sup> I have attached with my testimony an eye-witness account (published by *The Guardian*) of some of this illegal and despicable activity perpetrated by a man named Federman. The author, Zak Witus, says "[We] have also filmed Federman setting his German shepherd on a Palestinian resident of the area, biting his arm and abdomen, while other settlers pointed guns at Palestinian onlookers."

House Bill 1124 would prevent nonprofit charities registered in Maryland from knowingly aiding this type of illegal settler violence. The Attorney General could enforce the bill's provisions by suing for injunctive relief and damages. A victim could seek damages, and the Secretary of State could remove the nonprofit organization from the "Registry of Charitable Solicitation."

By issuing a favorable report on HB 1124, the Judiciary Committee would be reinforcing the action our Federal government has already taken to discourage illegal settler violence and harassment of Palestinians. It is important that Maryland stand for international law and justice and does not promote acts of greed or hatred based on ethnicity.

## ADDENDUM

[theguardian.com](https://theguardian.com)

# I met the Israeli settlers Biden placed sanctions on. They're bad – but part of a rotten system | Zak Witus

March 4, 2024

---

This month, the US, British and French governments placed sanctions on more than 30 Israeli settlers for acts of violence and incitement against Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank. It was a historic move. Israeli and international human rights organizations have protested the lack of accountability for settler violence for years. Now these settlers, with documented histories of arson, theft, physical assault and destruction of property, will have their assets frozen, travel abroad restricted, and ability to do business constrained.

These sanctions materially disrupt the machinery of settler violence and send perhaps the strongest signal yet to the Israeli government that it must curb attacks on Palestinian communities, because there will be consequences. But sanctions on just a few settlers won't solve the fundamental problem; these are not just a few bad apples. Sustained settler assaults on Palestinian lives and livelihood are part of systematic, longstanding Israeli government policy to push Palestinians off this land to expand settlements. It's the bad policy that produces the bad apples.

I have personally encountered some of these individuals. In 2022, I volunteered for three months as a human rights observer in Masafer Yatta, a rural area of the West Bank where Palestinian residents rely largely on shepherding and agriculture to earn a living. I confronted two of the settlers in question, Yinon Levi and Ely Federman, on a near weekly basis, and watched as they attacked Palestinians – unprovoked – with my own eyes.

Around the village of Zanuta, I witnessed Levi, Federman and their accomplices repeatedly attack Palestinian shepherds and their flocks with dogs and aerial drones. They would try to scare them into leaving their land, and then graze their own sheep and goats on the Palestinians' crops. In the village of Susiya, I filmed Levi and others illegally building a road to a settlement outpost on private Palestinian land. Another video shows Levi operating a bulldozer, shoveling huge piles of dirt on to a road in order to block the only entrance and exit to the village.

Fellow activists have also [filmed](#) Federman setting his German shepherd on a Palestinian resident of the area, biting his arm and abdomen, while other settlers pointed guns at Palestinian onlookers. (Federman's dog has been documented repeatedly [attacking](#) other Palestinian residents.)

During my time in the West Bank, I repeatedly witnessed the failure of the Israeli army and police to stop settler crimes. In fact, on several occasions, as Palestinian shepherds and activists

pleaded for help, the authorities either stood down or guarded the marauding settlers – to keep *the settlers* safe. And the culture of impunity for settlers goes way back. The Israeli watchdog group Yesh Din has been tracking settler violence since 2005, and they have consistently shown that fewer than 3% of cases of settler violence lead to conviction. More than 90% are closed without an indictment.

It's not just about the violence. Levi, for example, is not especially physically violent. There are other settlers with far grislier track records. He was punished because he is an organizer. From what I saw and what other human rights observers have told me, Biden's [executive order](#) got it right: Levi "led a group of settlers who engaged in actions creating an atmosphere of fear in the West Bank. He regularly led groups of settlers from the Meitarim Farm outpost that assaulted Palestinian and Bedouin civilians, threatened them with additional violence if they did not leave their homes, burned their fields and destroyed their property."

What the order didn't mention was that Israeli state agencies have contracted with Levi and his excavation and infrastructure company to carry out official demolition orders against Palestinian structures. In other words, the government and the military have been paying for him to destroy Palestinian homes.

One shepherd from Zanuta, 'Asir, told me that before the establishment of the Meitarim Farm outpost, which Levi founded, he and his community didn't have any problems shepherding in the area. By the time I arrived there, 'Asir said that it had been a full year of Levi and his gang regularly invading their land and letting their flocks graze on the villagers' crops. When the war in [Gaza](#) broke out, those same settlers grew bolder, coming in the night to destroy water tanks, piping and electrical systems, even entering people's homes to beat Palestinian shepherds.

A few weeks later, on 27 October, settlers [told](#) residents that if they did not leave within 24 hours, they would kill them. The next day, all 250 residents of Zanuta packed up and left. Over the course of the last month, settlers from the outpost [built a fence](#) around where the village used to be – so that 'Asir and his family couldn't come back.

People like Levi and Federman were considered extremists by the Israeli political establishment for a long time, but the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has changed that. When Netanyahu formed his current extremist government, he did so on the backs of far-right partners Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, whom he made high-ranking ministers despite their [personal histories](#) of [supporting nationalist violence](#).

2023 was the [worst year on record](#) for settler violence. Settlers attacked Palestinians and their property in more than 1,200 separate incidents. They killed at least 10 Palestinian people. They torched dozens of houses. And this was all before the Hamas attacks of 7 October. In the aftermath of the deadly violence, which left 1,200 Israelis dead and hundreds held hostage, Ben-Gvir [explicitly ordered](#) Israeli law-enforcement officers *not* to enforce the law in cases of Jewish nationalist violence. The Israeli military [drafted and armed](#) thousands of settlers, issuing them guns, uniforms and the protection of the state.

These policies have enabled settlers and Israeli armed forces to [forcibly remove](#) at least 198 Palestinian households (1,208 people, among them 586 children) from more than a dozen villages in the two months of November and December. As Yesh Din succinctly put it: "Settler violence is the policy of the Israeli government."

It isn't just this current government that's the problem. During my months in the West Bank in 2022, the "government of change" led by Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid was in power, and it presided over what was, [at the time](#), a record-setting year for settler violence. Since 1967, when Israel initially occupied the West Bank, every single Israeli government has made a choice to maintain Israel's military presence there and enable the settlement enterprise.

Settler violence is not a glitch in the system. It is a feature. While the state pursues a slow and steady strategy of dispossession by issuing demolition orders, night raids of villages and onerous checkpoints, settlers like Levi and Federman use vigilante violence and illegal construction to more quickly and directly achieve the same goals.

The US, UK and France imposing sanctions on these individuals sends a strong message to the Israeli government, and settlers across the West Bank, that the international community will no longer tolerate this level of violence. But, truthfully, it is not enough. The leader of Zanut, Faye al-Tal, said in an interview after the sanctions were made public, that he hopes that Biden's executive order [will extend](#) to officials such as Smotrich and Ben-Gvir. Human rights leaders around the world [agree](#) that this would be a helpful next step, one that the administration is [reportedly considering](#).

But targeting individuals, even powerful ones, fails on a basic level: it leaves intact the structures which allow Jewish Israelis to militarily, economically and legally dominate Palestinians in the West Bank. For the sake of both nations who live in the land between the river and the sea, we must uproot that system of Jewish supremacy in order to sow the seeds of a shared future for all Palestinians and Israelis.

- Zak Witus is the young leadership & education coordinator at the New Israel Fund

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/04/israel-settler-violence-sanctions>