

Impressions from a Tour of the Northern Jordan Valley

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March 2026

A tour of the Palestinian shepherding communities in the northern Jordan Valley illustrates a harsh and dramatic reality – certainly for a first-time visitor, but also for a seasoned activist. This is a wide, beautiful stretch of land, which, in the late winter and early spring, is entirely green. On the surface, it looks like a paradise for grazing; quiet and peaceful, with room enough for everyone. In practice, however, the situation for local shepherds is devastating. They are enduring a campaign of cruel terror – a living hell on earth. And all of this is of our own doing.

The shepherd communities that have lived for decades along the northern section of the Allon Road, between Jiftlik and the junction with the Jordan Valley Road (route 90), are being gradually driven out, and are simply disappearing. Families are selling their flocks and abandoning their homes because they can no longer withstand the combined pressure of a daily routine of brutal settler harassment and the cynical, aggressive blocking of access to their grazing lands.

This is not a temporary departure – it is permanent expulsion. The very night after families leave, settlers arrive and burn to the ground whatever remains, ensuring that those who have left have nowhere to return to. If this is not terror, we do not know what terror is.

Sites Visited During the Tour

Hammam al-Malih: Once home to a large community and a school, this site was finally abandoned in recent weeks following a long period of violent attacks and property destruction by settlers from a nearby outpost. One of us (Yuval) had the dubious pleasure of being there a month ago during such an incident while the family was still present. Today, the compound is a haunting sight – depressing and deeply painful. We met two shepherds who guard what is left of the buildings and tents by day but fear staying through the night. The children were sent away long ago to relatives in Area B (under Palestinian civil control), and now the flock is gone too, as Israeli settlers – backed by the army – prevent the animals from grazing.

Ain al-Hilweh: A small community located below the Maskiyot settlement. It is holding on for now, despite repeated demolitions and daily harassment. The community's cattle are starving; their ribs are visible. Even

so, this community is relatively fortunate because 100 meters away lies a spring – a permanent source of water. Twice a day, Israelis from the Jordan Valley Activists organization, during their "protective presence" duty by rotation, escort the cattle to the water for fear of rioters. The spring was recently "renovated" by settlers and renamed "The Flag Spring", the renovation being designed to prevent cattle from accessing the pool directly. Luckily, some water still flows downstream; hence the animals can drink.

Al-Farisiya: A community of four families opposite the Rotem settlement. It suffers from severe water shortage. Although a pipeline from Mekorot (Israel's national water company) runs nearby, it supplies water only to the settlement. Water for Al-Farisiya has to be brought in via tankers, at an enormous cost, subsidized by donations. The residents are essentially fenced in from around: on one side, a broad area that has been designated as a military firing zone, but despite it being completely inactive, entry is forbidden to Palestinians; and the other side is land allocated as grazing territory for a nearby Jewish settler outpost.

Khirbet Samra: A community near Umm Zuqa. Every day, rioters from the nearby Nof Gilad farm (of Uri Cohen) scatter the sheep and break into homes. The residents are utterly helpless, as the army and police often coordinate activity with the settlers rather than intervening. During our visit, we witnessed – in real time – the community's actual end: a truck arrived to dismantle the pens and haul the sheep away.

Humsa: An isolated community near the Roe settlement. Amidst blooming flowers and clear air, the only sign of the horror is an empty sheep pen. On March 14, an attack by settlers included appalling sexual violence and the theft of the entire flock – the residents' only source of livelihood. The flock is still missing. On March 22, one of us (Yuval) met the young man who was tortured, still traumatized and struggling to walk. That evening, the settlers returned, and beat one of the Israeli activists present. This was a small incident, not even recorded in the police logbook.

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Even a brief tour reveals that the devious, cruel and totally unlawful plan to expel Palestinian communities from the northern Jordan Valley is nearly complete. This is a glaring injustice and a stain on the State of Israel that cannot be erased. One can only behold the sights and weep; visit and be outraged.

But rage and tears are not enough. We must spread these facts and fight against the inconceivable evil and terror that settler leaders and their government allies justify by cynically appealing to the statement from the Jewish prayer book: “Thou hast chosen us from all the nations”.



At Hamam al-Malih (Photo: David Harel)



At Hamam al-Malih (Photo: David Harel)



At Humsa (Photo: Yuval Dor)



At Ain al-Hilweh (Photo: David Harel)

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Yuval Dor is a Professor of biology at the Faculty of Medicine of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He studies the mechanisms responsible for the development of diabetes and is involved in developing blood tests for the early diagnosis of diseases. He has been active in the "Jordan Valley Activists" group since 2023 – a group of around 150 Israeli volunteers dedicated to protecting the Palestinian shepherd communities in the northern Jordan Valley from dispossession and expulsion. The group's activities include continuous on-site protective presence; accompaniment during grazing; documentation of incidents and dissemination thereof through media; legal and material assistance to the communities; and attempts to communicate with the army and police.