

## **REPORT**

### **The military escort along the dangerous route to school for the children of Tuba and Maghayir Al Abeed, South Hebron Hills**

*School years 2011-2012 and 2012-2013*

August 25 marks the beginning of the new school year in the South Hebron Hill village of At-Tuwani, located in the southern West Bank. In order to reach the local school, which also serves the surrounding villages, the Palestinian children aged 6-15 walking from the nearby villages of Tuba and Maghayir Al Abeed, are accompanied by an Israeli military escort. They walk via the shortest route, which takes about twenty minutes, that passes between the Israeli settlement of Ma'on and the outpost of Havat Ma'on (Hill 833). This route is also the main road linking their villages and At-Tuwani, and is dangerous for the children since they have frequently suffered from settler attacks and harassment.

#### **History and context of the military escort**

From 2001, Israeli settlers from Havat Ma'on began repeatedly attacking Palestinian children on the way to and from school, preventing almost all of them from attending school and forcing the few children capable to take a long and rough path. In 2004, volunteers from Operation Dove and Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) began accompanying the children along the shortest route, but the violent attacks suffered by the children and now the volunteers themselves made this solution impractical. These attacks were brought to the attention of the Children Rights Committee of Israel's Knesset, which in November 2004 established a military escort to protect the children.

From November 2004, CPT and Operation Dove have constantly monitored the military escort, documenting failures of the Israeli army and ongoing settler violence toward the children.

Instances of settler aggression reveal significant Israeli military negligence in conducting the escort. Many times settler aggression has occurred when the escort was late and children had to wait or walk alone in risky areas. At other times, the aggression took place during the escort, as soldiers refused to walk with the children or to get out of the jeep when problems occurred.

Given the ongoing history of settler attacks and violence toward the school children, the mere presence of settlers along the route to school is enough to raise anxiety and alarm in the children, especially when and where the soldiers choose not to walk with them.

During the 2011-2012 and 2012-13 school years, Operation Dove volunteers documented numerous cases of violations, incompetence and soldier misconduct during the military escort of the school children.

## **Escort behavior during 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years**

### *Escort absent*

During the 2012-2013 school year, the military escort did not arrive in seven of 328 instances and the children were not escorted on their walk to or from school. This represents a total of 2 percent of all cases. Numbers for the 2011-2012 school year were almost identical: eight absences of the military escort, representing 2 percent of cases.

### *Escort incomplete*

In 2012-2013 and in contravention of the escort's protective mandate, in 78 percent of cases (i.e. 249 of 321 recorded cases in which the escort was present) the Israeli military failed to fully complete the escort and the soldiers did not accompany the children through to the end of the settlement. During the 2011-2012 school year the escort did not complete the path in 54 percent of recorded cases.

Furthermore in 2012-2013, in 37 percent of cases the escort refused to walk with the children, as established in the agreement between the Israel Civil Administration's District Coordination Office (DCO) and the mayor of At-Tuwani. During the 2011-2012 school year the escort did not walk with the children in 47 percent of recorded cases.

### *Escort late*

In 2012-2013, the children were late to school by more than five minutes due to escort tardiness in 27 percent of mornings. Throughout the school year, the children lost almost 17 hours because of late or missing military escorts (during the previous year this occurred in 35 percent of cases). In 52 percent of school days, the children had to wait more than five minutes after school for the military escort. In the afternoons, the children waited a total of 19 hours (during the previous year this occurred in 48 percent of cases).

### *Escort misconduct*

During the 2012-2013 school year, in 22 cases soldiers were aggressive toward the schoolchildren (for example, forcing them to run or shouting at them). In the previous year there were 28 cases.

## **Settler harassment and aggression during the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years**

During the 2012-2013 school year Operation Dove volunteers registered a total of five acts of harassment during the morning accompaniments and eight during the afternoon escorts, carried out against the Tuba and Maghayir Al Abeed schoolchildren by settlers from Ma'on and Havat Ma'on.

These 13 cases include a variety of actions from the settlers: five times settlers threw rocks at the children (twice using slingshots, the other three times the aggressions were conducted by settlers' children), once the children were detained for two hours by the army in cooperation with the Ma'on security chief, in one case settlers in a car harassed the children while in the remaining five cases, settlers approached the children, scaring them or interfering with the escort.

In at least six of these cases, the settler harassment happened in conjunction with escort negligence (i.e. the escort was not present or late, was far from the children or even left the children before the end of the path, soldiers were not walking).

In 2011-2012 ten acts of settler harassment occurred during the morning escorts and 11 during the afternoons: seven times settlers drove at the children with a car and in another six instances they approached them with a vehicle, passing amongst them or blocking them. In four cases the settlers intentionally scared the children, shouting and/or whistling at them, and in another four cases they scared the children just by approaching them. In at least 14 of these cases the escort was negligent.

Despite the escort negligence and ongoing settler impunity, the military escort constitutes a deterrent and limits the acts of harassment and aggression of the settlers, allowing these children to go to school.



**2012-12-02. Escort misconduct: the escort is very far from the children.**



**2012-12-26. The escort did not arrive and the volunteers accompanied the children through a much longer route, still dangerous because of the proximity of Havat Ma'on outpost.**