



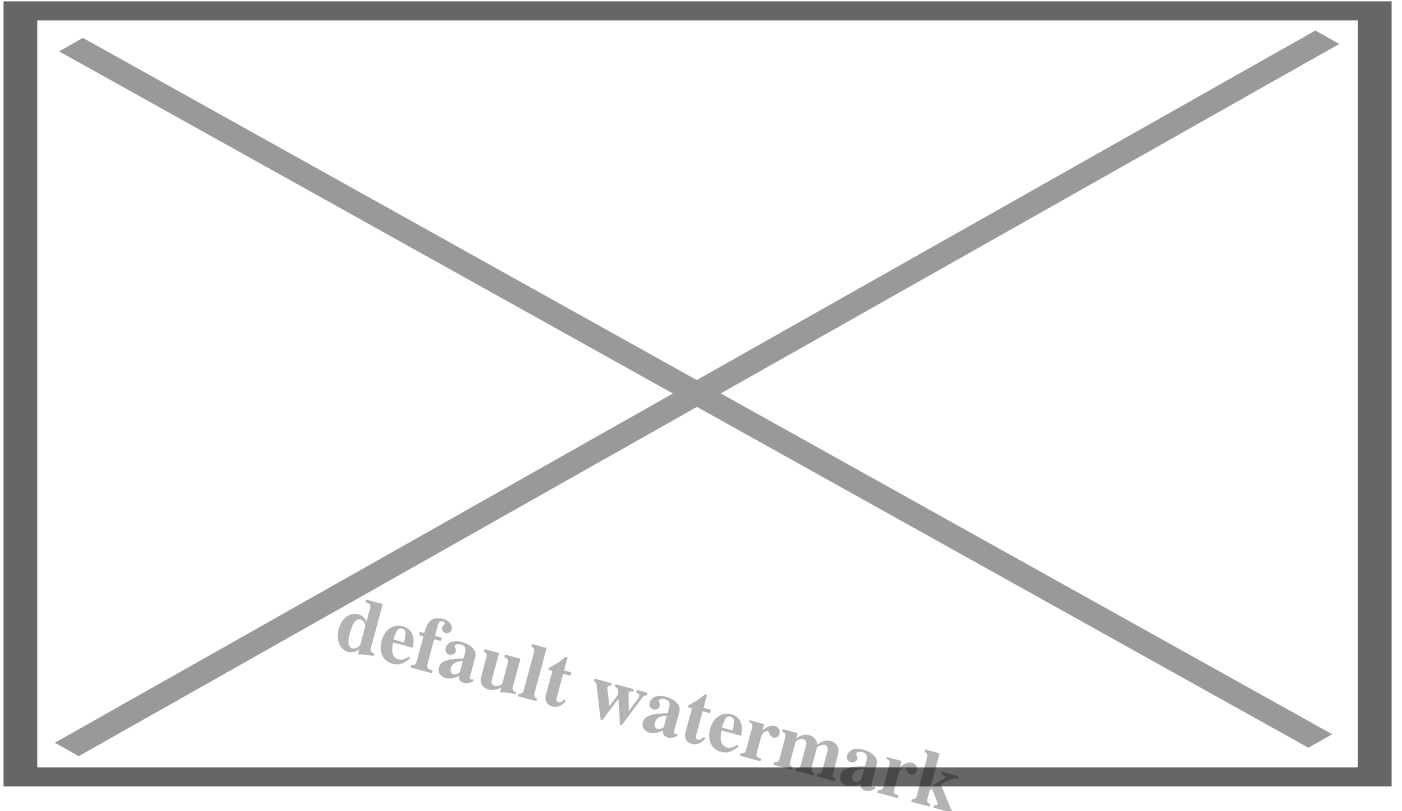
Palestinian farmer defies eviction threats

Description

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Palestinian farmer, occupied West Bank

Ayoub Abuhejleh, a 57-year-old Palestinian farmer from the village of Deir Istiya, occupied West Bank, is on a horticultural crusade through his work with the [Economic and Social Development Centre](#) of Palestine. Abuhejleh, who is also the village's former mayor (2011 - 2014) has swapped his suit for farming tools adamant to stay put on his land.



Farmer ordered to leave his farmland

Since 2023, Abuhejleh has planted 370 olive trees, as well as almonds, figs, and grapes. "I've raised these olive trees as my own children," he tells the *Canary*. These plants and trees line the agricultural road leading to and from his land.

Abuhejleh spoke of the ancestral connection binding Palestinians to their lands and orchards. He is among countless Palestinians cultivating the land where their parents and their forefathers were born and raised. His family kept sheep and goats, worked their land with horses, and planted corn and other crops.

In June 2023, a settler with sheep and goats set up an outpost just 350 metres from Abuhejleh's land. Initially, the settler caused no problems but four months later, after 7 October, everything changed. He explained that:

The settler became more aggressive, and other settlers also started coming to the outpost. They closed off my agricultural land so there was no access for me, and they also cut the main irrigation pipe.

A week later, Israeli occupation soldiers approached Abuhejleh and his family on their land while they harvested olives. It was the first time the trees were producing olives since they were planted. They quizzed the family before asking them to evacuate their grove.

Court win for Palestinian farmer, as eviction pressure mounts

This is a [familiar story](#) across the occupied West Bank. Rights groups and residents have [documented](#) occupation soldiers [colluding](#) with settlers to eject Palestinians from their land, citing intimidation, violence, arrests, and movement restrictions. The end goal is to ethnically cleanse the area and force Palestinians to cede their land. Abuhejleh was told:

It's forbidden to go on my land, because there is a war. They said they want to protect me. I told them I knew they had come to protect the settlers because before the outpost they hadn't come here. The soldier said he didn't care what I said. I was given five minutes to leave.

In the area surrounding Deir Istiya village, more than 200 hectares of Palestinian-owned land have been seized so far by occupation forces – no longer accessible to Palestinian residents. Approximately 25 percent of the land is cultivated, while the rest is used for grazing. The loss has had devastating consequences for the local community.

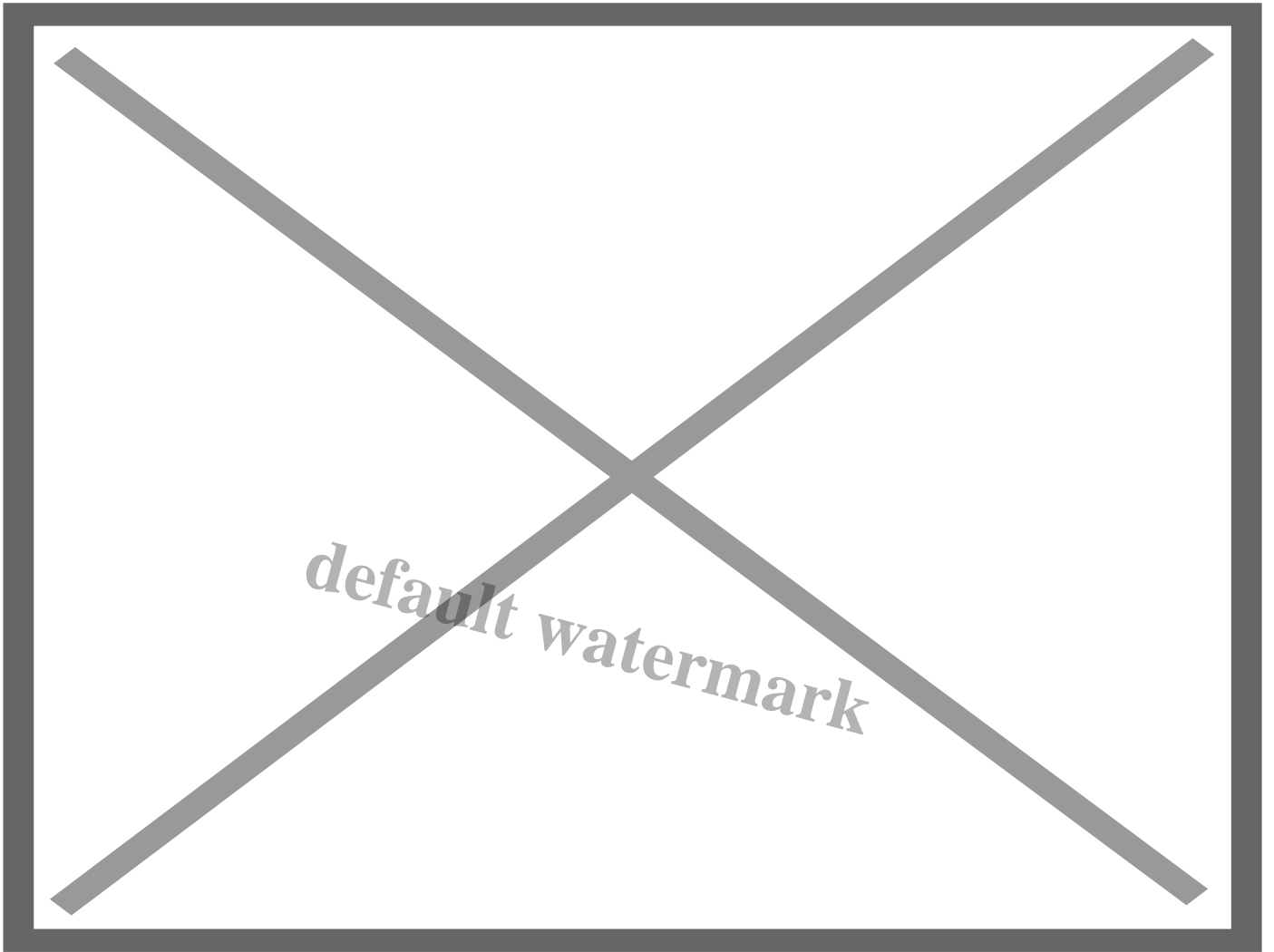
Abuhejleh decided to fight for his right to stay on the land. He took the case to the courts, and in April 2025, an Israeli court ruled in his favour. The judge said he could reconnoitre the area, repair the road, and return to his land.

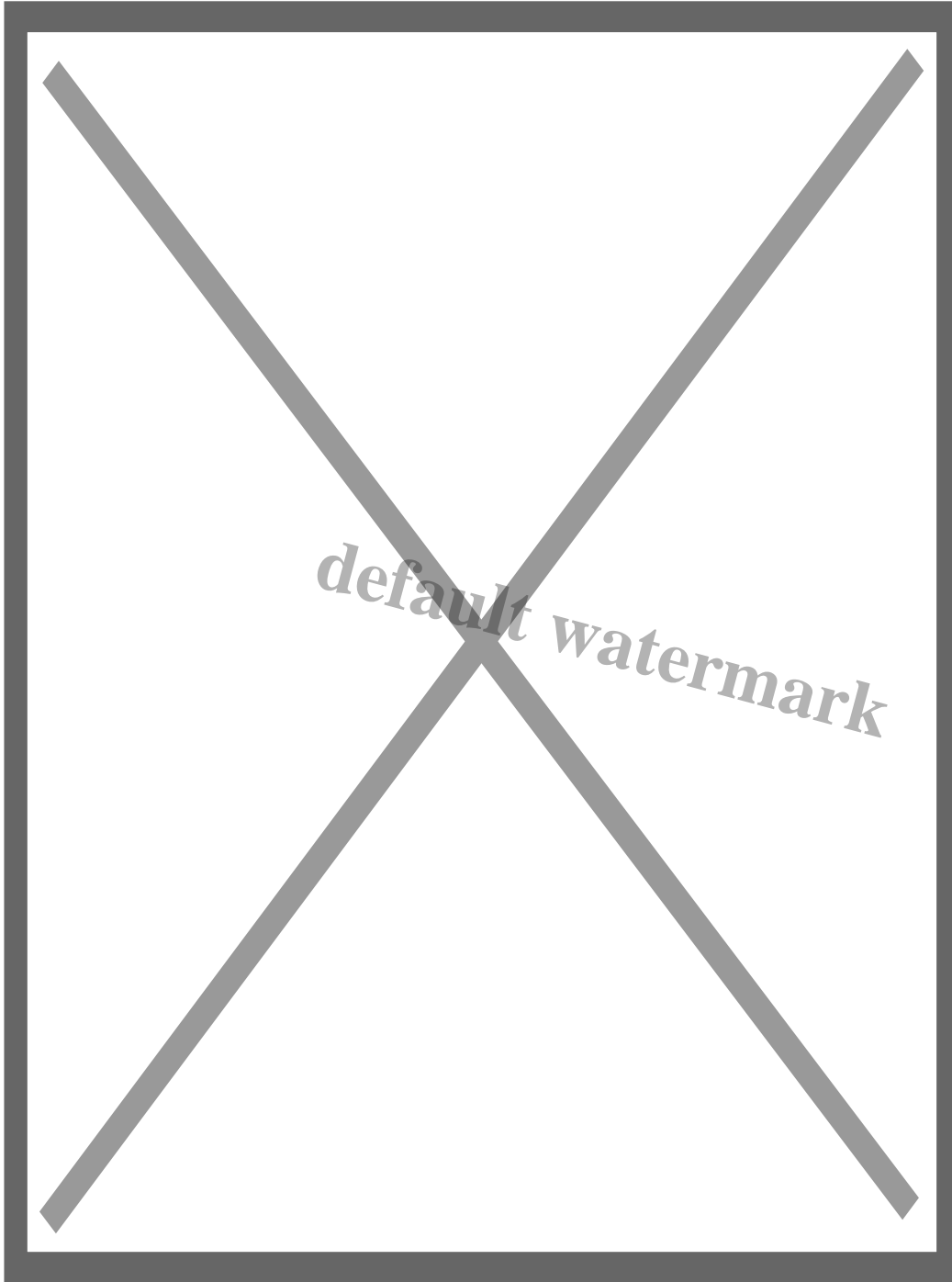
He did just that, but occupation soldiers continue to show up. He told the *Canary* how they police his every move – telling him where he can and cannot go – and take photographs of him and the Israeli activist accompanying local farmers for protection.

Sometimes they come and say we must leave, because it is a military zone. But we go weekly to the land still. In harvest season they attack us. They also make it impossible to prune, fertilize, irrigate or plough the land. This means the trees will become weaker and weaker, because we can't take care of them.

This is what they are planning. Also, when an area is closed and we are unable to go on our land, they then steal it from us. This is because, under Israeli occupation laws, if you don't plough your land for five years it then belongs to the state.

<https://www.thecanary.co/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/ayoub-vid.mp4>





Abuhejleh was recently told that he needed permission from the Israeli Coordination and Liaison Office to enter his land. Without written consent, he was told he would have to leave. He refused of course, citing the Israeli court ruling granting him unhindered access to his farmland. His lawyer is now back in court arguing his case.

Abuhejleh says "Israel" has always made life difficult for Palestinians.

Israel controls everything- health, education, the economy, political issues, and also agriculture. Our village completely depends on Israeli company Mekorot for our water supply. So sometimes we wake up to find there is no water. They have cut it off completely. Lots of Palestinian farmers lose money instead of making any profit, and many are now going out of business, due to the actions of Israel. It damages the market by selling Israeli produce at lower prices than that from Palestine. They wait until Palestinian produce, for example tomatoes, are ready and go to market, and then they bring Israeli tomatoes to sell there instead. These are, of course, at a cheaper price.

This land is our land

For decades, occupation force have intentionally destroyed olive trees. They are a defining symbol of Palestinian identity and a key component of agrarian life and the local Palestinian economy.

Abuhejleh told the *Canary* that in Deir Istiya, occupation forces have uprooted 500 olive trees, all more than 200 years old. The so-called "security" excuse was parroted by the Apartheid state, with the military claiming that Palestinians had been throwing stones at settlers' cars. This excuse was then used to clear the trees Abuhejleh had planted along a main road. The damage was done.

Settlers, no different to their military counterparts, have also been intentionally destroying trees. Farmers fence off their land to prevent livestock damaging their trees. But now find that settlers cut through these fences and allow their sheep and goats to eat the saplings and young trees. Branches which are too high for livestock to reach are often deliberately broken.

Abuhejleh describes the past two years as the worst he can remember. Still, he refuses to let up, and cede his land to illegal settlers, cognizant of the daily risk of death Palestinians face.

Hopes of a better future

Settler expansionism and violence across the occupied West Bank is well organised, and financially backed by the Israeli occupation government.

Abuhejleh believes there will be tough and dangerous times ahead but remains hopeful that someday the situation will change. The war in Gaza has raised awareness among young people worldwide. He hopes that a new generation will confront and back an alternative to the terrorist regime that is Israel. Abuhejleh says:

We must fight as much as we can for access to our land, although they arrest us. I have been arrested many times, shoot us, and take what they want. We will stay here. Land is part of our life. We look with one eye on our family, and the other eye on our land.

Observers suggest this is why the Israeli occupation is in a hurry to alter the situation on the ground, and to quash the prospect of a Palestinian state for the future. In the wake of 7 October, Palestinian land theft and illegal settlement expansion in the West Bank have continued. Israeli lawmakers are also

seeking to repeal the 2005 [Disengagement law to repopulate previously evacuated illegal Israel settlements.](#)

For Abuhejleh, the olive trees he planted more than a decade ago have become a symbol of a wider struggle unfolding across the occupied West Bank — one in which access to land, water and livelihoods is increasingly contested. But like most Palestinians, leaving was never an option.

Featured image via David Silverman/Getty Images

By [Charlie Jaay](#)

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