



Humanitarian Coordinator, James W. Rawley, visits Palestinian, olive-producing communities and calls for support for the Palestinian olive sector

The Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. James W. Rawley, visited two Palestinian, olive-producing communities in the central West Bank today, along with members of the diplomatic and donor community, the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, and representatives of humanitarian organizations.

“The annual olive harvest is a key economic, social and cultural event for Palestinians,” said Mr. Rawley. “Nearly half of all cultivated land in the occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) is planted with olive trees.”

Community representatives and olive farmers in the towns of Al Janiya in the Ramallah governorate, and Biddu in the Jerusalem governorate described the negative impact that continued settler violence and access restrictions to their olive groves have on their lives and livelihoods. United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations briefed the delegation on programs supporting these and other communities in the West Bank.

Every year, communities with olive groves located between the Barrier and the Green Line, and in the vicinity of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, face serious challenges in maintaining and harvesting their olive crops. This undermines livelihoods and increases dependency on aid.

“Immediate action in support of olive farmers is required. This includes ensuring protection from attacks by settlers; accountability for settler violence; the lifting of restrictions on Palestinians’ access to their agricultural land; and continued support to olive producing communities. Alternatively, we risk further, possibly irreversible damage to the olive sector in the West Bank,” Mr. Rawley alerted.

Background: The olive oil industry constitutes 25 per cent of the oPt’s agricultural income. From 2006 to the end of September 2014, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recorded over 2,300 settler-related incidents resulting in Palestinian casualties or property damage in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. From 2009 to the end of August 2014, nearly 50,000 fruit-bearing trees, mainly olive trees, were destroyed or damaged in such incidents. Approximately 150 Palestinian communities have land located between the Barrier and the Green Line. Only some 50 per cent of permit applications for farmers’ access to their own agricultural land are approved during the olive harvest, based on monitoring by OCHA over a four-year period.

ENDS

For more information, please contact: Ofir Feuerstein, + 972 (0) 54 33 11 836