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Smoke is seen from Israel's side during a raid on Jenin refugee camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Jalamah checkpoint, July 3, 2023. Cardinal-designate Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, visited Jenin July 10, days after the Israel Defense Forces launched air and ground attacks on the camp. (OSV News photo/Ronen Zvulun, Reuters)



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Cardinal-designate Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, expressed the need to respect and protect the life and dignity of Palestinians during a July 10 visit to Jenin, following the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the city July 5.

"I see another face of resilience. I see people suffering, people experiencing the consequences of the occupation, but at the same time I see people who don't want to leave, who don't give up, who don't let anyone break down their will to live with dignity in their homeland," said the cardinal-designate in an interview with Franciscan Christian Media Center, a day after being named a cardinal by Pope Francis.

On July 3, the Israeli military launched a major assault on the Jenin refugee camp located in the West Bank Palestinian city of Jenin in a two-day operation that they said was meant to destroy militant infrastructure and weapons, cracking down on a hotbed of Palestinian militant activity.

Twelve Palestinians and one Israeli soldier were killed during the operation, and more than 100 Palestinians were wounded, including civilians.

In a July 4 statement, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem condemned the violence and demanded a ceasefire. "(We) hope for pursuit of peace and dialogue to prevent other future unjustified attacks on the population," he said.

The assault was the largest incursion against Palestinian militants in 20 years, since fighting during the Second Intifada, or uprising, in the early 2000s. The attack came amid a string of terror attacks by Palestinians and nightly Israel Defence Forces military raids.

Since the beginning of this year, 25 Israelis have been killed in Palestinian attacks in Israel and the West Bank, including soldiers and civilians. During this period, at least 152 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed, with most of them being involved in clashes with security forces or carrying out attacks. However, there also were cases of uninvolved civilians being killed.

The July military attack caused major damage to the city's roads and buildings, including the Latin Catholic Church of the Holy Redeemer, when a large explosion near the church shattered windows, destroyed the electrical source and caused other structural damage.

The explosion took place on the night of the invasion when no one was in the church, so no one was injured while fighting was taking place outside, Fr. Labib Deibs, the parish priest, told the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem Media Center.

Young members of the parish swept up the broken glass and cleaned the church as best they could, and they were able to pray there, said Deibs.

"We ask God to bring peace to this land, because it desperately needs it. Human rights need to be protected in order for human beings to live a respectful life," he said. "We pray for peace to manifest in this land."

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According to a July 6 report by the Norwegian Refugee Council, this year is on track to be the deadliest year in the occupied West Bank since the UN began recording casualties in 2005. The report noted that since Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned to power late last year with Israel's most extreme nationalist-religious government, conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory have rapidly deteriorated.

"Settlement expansion, home demolitions and violence perpetrated by Israeli forces and settlers are increasing humanitarian suffering and fuelling further tensions

across the West Bank," said Caroline Ort, the Norwegian Refugee Council's country director for Palestine, in the report. "Third states must demand that Israeli authorities respect and protect the rights of Palestinians, abide by the provisions of the law of occupation and applicable rules on the use of lethal force, and work to de-escalate the ongoing violence."

This year also is on course to surpass 2022's record-setting year for settler attacks and demolitions by Israel in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the report continued.

The Norwegian Refugee Council report said the U.N. has documented more than 441 settler attacks in the first half of this year, compared to 343 during the same period last year. The report said these included multiple large-scale attacks in which dozens of settlers have rampaged through Palestinian communities, attacking civilians and causing widespread destruction.

The report maintained that settler violence is often overlooked by Israeli forces and even encouraged by officials and ministers in the current Israeli government.

"The attacks are rarely investigated by Israeli authorities. Sometimes they are perpetrated under the protection or with the assistance of Israeli forces," said the report. Israeli authorities have also promoted more than 13,000 new settlement housing units so far this year, adding to the rising tensions.

Though Israel insisted that the Jenin incursion was meant to weaken the militant groups, the Palestinian defiance left in the wake of its devastation has instead only deepened, according to CNN.

Christians are a tiny minority in Jenin, with some 200 Christians living among the city's Muslim majority, who number 50,000 residents. Approximately one-third of the population lives in the Jenin refugee camp.

Pizzaballa's visit included seeing civil authorities in Jenin Governorate, and the Jenin Governmental Hospital, and a tour of the Jenin refugee camp. The cardinal-designate stressed the need to stop all forms of violence and to seek a just and comprehensive solution to bring peace to the Holy Land.

"As a church we don't have an army, we don't have weapons, we don't believe in violence, we are against all forms of violence. But we are here to express our solidarity with the dignity and freedom of Palestinians," he said. "Hope remains, as

well as the need to seek a just and comprehensive peace that includes all parties."