News



Char marks Palestinians say are from an attack by Israeli settlers are visible in the cemetery nearby the Saint George Greek Orthodox Church in the West Bank village of Taybeh, Monday, July 14, 2025. (AP/Nasser Nasser)

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TAYBEH, West Bank — July 16, 2025

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Top church leaders in the Holy Land asserted Monday that Israeli authorities "facilitate and enable" the presence of Israeli settlers who have intensified attacks in recent weeks on the only entirely Christian Palestinian village remaining in the occupied West Bank.

Speaking in the village, Taybeh, on a rare solidarity visit, Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III and Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa denounced an incident last week when settlers set fires near the community's church. They alleged that Israeli authorities failed to respond to emergency calls for help from the Palestinian community.

In a separate statement, the patriarchs and heads of churches in Jerusalem demanded an investigation into the incident and called for the settlers to be held accountable by the Israeli authorities, "who facilitate and enable their presence around Taybeh."

The church leaders also claimed that settlers had brought their cattle to graze on Palestinian lands in the area, set fire to several homes last month and put up a sign reading "there is no future for you here."

Israel's military did not immediately respond to the allegations. It has previously said it takes action against outlaw settlers and that many incidents of settler violence involve stone-throwing and clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians.

The war in Gaza has sparked a surge of violence in the West Bank, with the Israeli military targeting militants in large-scale operations that have killed hundreds of Palestinians and displaced tens of thousands. That has coincided with a rise in settler violence and Palestinian attacks on Israelis. Palestinian militants have attacked and killed Israelis in Israel and the West Bank.

Pizzaballa, the top Catholic cleric in Jerusalem, said he believed the West Bank was becoming a lawless area.

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"The only law (in the West Bank) is that of power, of those who have the force, not the law. We must work for the law to return to this part of the country, so anyone can appeal to the law to enforce their rights," Pizzaballa told reporters.

He and Theophilos prayed together in the church of St. George, whose religious site dates back centuries, adjacent to the area where settlers ignited the fires.

The statement from the heads of churches comes as Palestinians report a surge of settler violence. On Sunday, hundreds descended on the village of Al-Mazraa a-Sharqiya, south of Taybeh, for the funeral of two young men killed during a settler attack on Friday.

The Christian community in Israel and the Palestinian territories has dwindled as a percentage of the overall population over the decades, with experts citing lower birthrates and emigration by people fleeing conflict or seeking better opportunities abroad. Christians now make up a tiny percentage of the population.