

Israel Arrests Jerusalem Activists Protesting Forced Evictions In Sheikh Jarrah

The arrests of Muhammad and Muna al-Kurd come after the Israeli armed forces temporarily detained prominent Al Jazeera journalist Givara Budeiri.



A Palestinian protester lifts a national flag amid confrontations with Israeli security forces at the Hawara checkpoint south of Nablus city, in the occupied West Bank, on May 21, 2021, following demonstrations in support of Palestinians in Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah and the Gaza Strip.

AP

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JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli police burst into the home of a prominent family in the contested Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem on Sunday, the family said, arresting a 23-year-old woman who has led protests against attempts by Jewish settlers to evict dozens of Palestinian families from their homes in the area. The young woman was later released, but her twin brother turned himself in and remained in custody.

The arrests came a day after Israeli police detained a well-known Al Jazeera reporter covering a demonstration in the neighborhood. The reporter, Givara Budeiri, was held

for four hours before she was released and sent to a hospital to treat a broken hand. It was not clear how her hand was broken, but her boss blamed police mistreatment.

Earlier this year, heavy-handed police actions in Sheikh Jarrah and other parts of east Jerusalem fueled weeks of unrest that helped spark an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

Those tensions are simmering again this week — and could flare anew if Israeli ultranationalists follow through on plans to march Thursday through the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. Israeli police were expected to hold consultations on whether the parade, which was originally set to take place when the war erupted on May 10, would be allowed to proceed.

Renewed violence could complicate the task of embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's opponents, who formed a fragile and disparate coalition last week, of passing a parliamentary vote of confidence needed for them to replace him and take office. A close ally of Netanyahu oversees the police.

In Sheikh Jarrah, Jewish settlers have been waging a decades-long campaign to evict the families from densely populated Palestinian neighborhoods just outside the walls of the Old City. The area is one of the most sensitive parts of east Jerusalem, which is home to sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims and which Israel captured in 1967 and annexed in a move not recognized internationally. Israel views the entire city as its capital, while the Palestinians want east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state.

Settler groups and Israeli officials say the Sheikh Jarrah dispute is merely about real estate. But Palestinians say they are victims of a discriminatory system. The settlers are using a 1970 law that allows Jews to reclaim formerly Jewish properties lost during the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, a right denied to Palestinians who lost property in the same conflict.

The al-Kurd family in Sheikh Jarrah has been at the forefront of months of protests against the planned evictions.

Early Sunday, police took Muna al-Kurd, 23, from her home.

Her father, Nabil al-Kurd, said police "stormed the house in large numbers and in a barbaric manner."

“I was sleeping, and I found them in my bedroom,” he said. Police then searched the house and arrested his daughter. Video posted on social media showed her being taken away in handcuffs.

“The reason for the arrest is that we say that we will not leave our homes, and they do not want anyone to express his opinion, they do not want anyone to tell the truth,” he said. “They want to silence us.”

Police also searched for her brother, Muhammad al-Kurd, but he was not there. Later, he turned himself in to Jerusalem police.

The siblings’ lawyer, Nasser Odeh, told journalists outside the police station that his clients were accused of “disturbing public security and participation in nationalistic riots.”

Late Sunday, Muna al-Kurd was released. But before she was freed, police briefly clashed with a crowd outside the station, throwing stun grenades. Her brother remained in custody.



JERUSALEM, JUNE 06: Israeli police detain 23 year-old Palestinian activist Muna al-Kurd in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem on June 06, 2021. She is one of Palestinian women leading protests against Israel's forced evictions and threats of displacement in Sheikh Jarrah.

The arrests came a day after Al Jazeera's Budeiri, wearing a protective vest marked "press," was dragged away by police at a protest in Sheikh Jarrah.

According to witnesses, police asked Budeiri for identification. Colleagues said police did not allow her to return to her car to retrieve her government-issued press card. Instead, they said she was surrounded by police, handcuffed and dragged into a vehicle with darkened windows.



JERUSALEM - JUNE 05: Al Jazeera journalist Givara Budeiri is being taken into custody by Israeli police while she was covering a sitting protest Israel's decision to evict Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem on June 05, 2021.

In video footage posted online, Budeiri can be seen in handcuffs, while clutching her notebook and shouting, "Don't touch, enough, enough."

Israeli police said entrance to the neighborhood is limited due to the tense situation, and only accredited journalists are allowed in. They said that when Budeiri was unable to provide her press pass, police "removed her." They added that Budeiri was arrested after becoming hostile and pushing an officer.

"The Israel Police will allow the freedom of press coverage, provided that these are done in accordance (with) the law while maintaining public order," according to a statement. The statement did not reference her broken hand.

Budeiri was held for four hours before she was released and sent to the hospital, said Walid Omary, the Jerusalem bureau chief for Al Jazeera. In addition to the broken hand, Omary said Budeiri also suffered bruises on her body. He said her cameraman's video camera was also heavily damaged by police.

As part of her release, Budeiri is banned from returning to the neighborhood for 15 days, Omary said.

"They are attacking the journalists in east Jerusalem because they don't want them to continue covering what's happening inside Sheikh Jarrah," he said.

The Foreign Press Association, which represents hundreds of journalists working for international news organizations, said the treatment of Budeiri was "the latest in a long line of heavy-handed tactics by Israeli police" against the media in recent weeks. It said journalists have been hit by stun grenades, tear gas, sponge-tipped bullets and putrid-smelling water.

"We call on police to punish the officers who needlessly injured an experienced journalist and broke professional equipment. And once again, we urge police to uphold Israel's pledges to respect freedom of the press and to allow journalists to do their jobs freely and without fear of injury and intimidation," the FPA said.

Last month's war was triggered by weeks of clashes in Jerusalem between Israeli police and Palestinian protesters in and around the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint holy site.

The war erupted on May 10 when Hamas, calling itself the defender of the holy city, launched a barrage of rockets at Jerusalem. Some 254 people were killed in Gaza and 13 in Israel before a cease-fire took effect on May 21.

Al Jazeera's acting director general, Mostefa Souag, noted that Budeiri's detention came after Israel's May 15 war-time destruction of a Gaza high-rise that housed the local office of Al Jazeera. The tower also housed The Associated Press' office.

Israel has alleged that Hamas military intelligence was operating from the building. The AP has said it has no indication of a purported Hamas presence and has called for an independent investigation.