American shot dead at West Bank demo where Israeli forces opened fire

AFP – A Turkish-American woman was shot dead Friday while demonstrating against Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank town of Beita, where the army acknowledged opening fire.

Turkey identified the woman as Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, condemning her death, while the United States called it a "tragic" event and pressed its ally Israel to investigate.

The UN rights office said Israeli forces killed Eygi with a "shot in the head", while an AFP photographer saw medics rushing her into a Nablus hospital with her head wrapped in bandages.

The UN said Eygi, 26, was participating in a "peaceful anti-settlement protest" in Beita, scene of weekly demonstrations.

Israeli settlements in the West Bank – where about 490,000 people live – are illegal under international law.

The Eviatar settlement outpost overlooking Beita has been backed by far-right Israeli ministers and has drawn protesters to the nearby hillside in recent years, during which Israeli forces have killed multiple Palestinians.

Eygi arrived at the Rafidia hospital in Nablus "with a gunshot in the head" and was later pronounced dead, said hospital director Fouad Nafaa.

Turkey said she was killed by "Israeli occupation soldiers", with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemning the Israeli action as "barbaric".

Israel's top ally Washington said it had "reached out to the

government” for more information.

“We are deeply disturbed by the tragic death of an American citizen,” said White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

Qatar – a key mediator in truce talks to end the Gaza war – condemned the “Israeli occupation’s assassination” of Eygi as a “heinous crime”.

“The silence of the international community in the face of these horrific violations is a renewed incentive for the occupation to commit more atrocities,” a foreign ministry statement said.

– ‘Series of crimes’ –

Eygi was a member of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), a pro-Palestinian organisation, and was in Beita for a weekly demonstration against Israeli settlements, said Neta Golan, the group’s co-founder.

Beita mayor Mahmud Barham said he was told an Israeli soldier “fired two shots” at protesters demonstrating against an Israeli settlement outpost, with one bullet hitting Eygi “in the head”.

An ISM activist, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the gunfire was “a shot to kill” and reported seeing “blood coming out of her head”.

The movement said she was standing around 200 metres from Israeli soldiers.

The Israeli military said its forces “responded with fire toward a main instigator of violent activity who hurled rocks at the forces and posed a threat to them”.

Since Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel which triggered the war in Gaza, Israeli troops or settlers have killed more than 690 Palestinians in the West Bank, according to the

Palestinian health ministry.

At least 23 Israelis, including security forces, have been killed in Palestinian attacks during the same period, according to Israeli officials.

– Jenin pullout –

The incident took place as Israeli forces withdrew from a deadly 10-day raid in the West Bank city of Jenin, where AFP journalists reported residents returning home to widespread destruction.

The raid on Jenin and other parts of the West Bank killed “35 terrorists’, the Israeli military said Friday, stressing that its operation was not yet over.

The UN rights office said however that eight children were among 36 Palestinians killed in the operation launched on August 28.

The Jenin pullout came with Israel at loggerheads with the US over talks to forge a truce in the 11-month Gaza war.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday “90 percent is agreed” and urged Israel and Hamas to finalise a deal.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied this, telling Fox News: “It’s not close.”

Netanyahu has insisted on a military presence on the border between Gaza and Egypt along the so-called Philadelphi Corridor.

Hamas is demanding a complete Israeli withdrawal, saying it agreed months ago to a proposal outlined by US President Joe Biden.

As Israel kept up its bombardment of Gaza, the territory’s civil defence agency reported an Israeli strike killed four

people and wounded 19 in the northern Jabalia refugee camp.

Four others were killed and 10 wounded in Israeli shelling in Al-Bureij refugee camp, central Gaza, the agency said overnight into Saturday.

Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,205 people, mostly civilians including some hostages killed in captivity, according to official Israeli figures.

Of 251 hostages seized by Palestinian militants during the attack, 97 remain in Gaza including 33 the Israeli military says are dead. Scores were released during a one-week truce in November.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive in Gaza has so far killed at least 40,878 people, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

Most of the dead are women and children, according to the UN rights office.

AFP