



Hundreds gather for funeral of Israeli Arab man killed by police

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Hundreds of people gathered in the northern village of Arara midday Friday for the funeral of an Israeli Arab man killed by police the day before.

Milham's body was taken from his home to the village mosque, where the Friday prayer was held. The funeral procession left the mosque after the prayer. Hundreds attended the congregation, conducted by Umm el-Fahm mayor Hashem Abd al-Rahman.

During the funeral, Higher Israeli Arab Monitoring Committee Chairman Shuweiki Hatib called for the probe into the killing to be wrested from the hands of the Justice Ministry's police investigations department.

"The police investigations department are liars who also lied to the Orr Commission," he said, referring to the panel established in the wake of the October 2000 riots in which 13 Israeli Arabs were killed by police.

Police said the shooting was in self-defense and took place after Milham threatened one of the policemen with a loaded gun, but his family says he was murdered in cold blood.

Police were on alert in the area Friday, deploying 2,000 officers to the north for fear of riots during and after the funeral of Nadim Milham, 28, but no disturbances were reported.

Police sources on Friday afternoon said they expect Wadi Ara to remain quiet and don't expect any further disturbances in the area.

Police did not enter the Wadi Ara village itself, apparently in an effort to avoid clashes, but were stationed nearby as mourners arrived.

"I think there will be no stone-throwing today and the funeral will take place in an orderly fashion," said Jamir Marzuk, head of the Arara local council.

Dozens of local residents threw rocks along Highway 65 on Thursday and clashed with police forces to protest the shooting. Five policemen were lightly injured.

Nonetheless, Yaakov Zigdon, police commander in the area, said Friday that for the most part, order had prevailed the day before and would do so during the funeral as well.

"Quiet was maintained yesterday, and I believe that today as well quiet will be maintained," he told Israel Radio.

Police met with local community leaders Thursday to discuss the shooting, said Zigdon, adding that police themselves had requested an investigation. "No one is distinguishing between blood and blood," he said.

The Justice Ministry's police investigations department is probing the shooting.

The Higher Arab Monitoring Committee will convene an emergency meeting in Arara after the funeral. The committee stated it would discuss future moves due to "the escalation in police conduct towards Arab citizens."

MK Ahmed Tibi said Friday he was going to the funeral to protest the way police treat Israeli Arabs.

"Our goal is not to riot," he said. "We will express our anger ... over the way the police treat us like the enemy. The goal isn't to create disturbances, but to show solidarity with the victim's family."

According to police, officers entered Milham's house to search for weapons and drugs. Milham ran from the house, shouting, and opened fire in the air with a handgun. As he reached an enclosed area and found himself unable to flee any further, he turned and aimed the handgun at an officer who was chasing him. The officer, fearing for his life, opened fire and shot Milham.

Milham's family disputed the police's version of the incident and said he was murdered in cold blood. They said Milham had not threatened officers and that the incident did not have to end with his death.

The family also said the police decision to disperse local residents after the stone-throwing began was unnecessary, as the riot was a way to let off steam.

"The police are able to act with us the way it acts with the settlers in Hebron," a relative said.

Milham, who had a police record of violence and weapons-related charges, died of his wounds at Hillel Yaffeh Medical Center in Hadera. His body was transferred to the Abu Kabir Institute of Forensic Medicine in south Tel Aviv for an autopsy.

Following the shooting, a senior police officer met with village leaders. She explained to them the police's version of events and said relations with the local community are good. Police do not believe the shooting will necessarily affect these relations, she said.