



Villagers from Midiya protesting the removal of olive trees from their area via for attention with other demonstrators opposite the Prime Minister's Office. On hand were Citizens Rights Movement protesters demanding an investigation into the Shin Bet affair; Beduin demanding housing; and ultra-Orthodox protesters against the Mormon Brigham Young study centre.

(Isaac Harari)

Villagers bring olive-tree trunks to demonstration at PM's office

By JOEL GREENBERG
Jerusalem Post Reporter

Villagers from Midiya in the West Bank demonstrated yesterday in front of the Prime Minister's Office to protest against the uprooting of olive and fruit trees in and around their village two weeks ago. The villagers, who say 3,300 trees were bulldozed and cut down, stood behind two large uprooted olive-tree trunks they had brought to refute claims by the Israel Lands Administration that only four- and five-year-old trees had been uprooted.

The administration says the trees

were illegally planted on state land, though villagers have argued that the lands were registered in their names.

Signs carried by the demonstrators said trees as old as 60 years had been pulled out from land which had been cultivated by villagers for generations. Other signs demanded that those responsible for the uprooting operation be brought to justice, and that the cultivated areas be returned for use by the villagers.

Nuri el-Uqbi, who has represented the villagers and also chairs the Committee for Defence of Beduin Rights, requested a meeting

with Agriculture Minister Arye Nehamkin and submitted a letter asking him to visit the demonstrators. He received no reply.

One elderly villager, Yousef Mustafa, who lost some 800 trees and was the hardest hit by the uprooting operation, was overcome by emotion and fainted. He was taken to hospital by ambulance.

Villagers later resisted police efforts to remove the tree trunks, climbing onto the trees and clinging to them. After further negotiations with police at the scene, the villagers were lifted from the trees by police.