

West Bank and Gaza 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

On October 7, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian terrorists launched a large-scale attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip, killing an estimated 1,200 individuals, injuring more than 5,400, and abducting 253 hostages. Israel responded with a sustained, wide-scale military operation in Gaza, which had killed more than 21,000 Palestinians (about 1 percent of Gaza's population) and injured more than 56,000 (more than 2 percent of Gaza's population) by the end of the year, displaced the vast majority of Palestinians in Gaza, and resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis with estimates of 50-70 percent of buildings destroyed or damaged. The continuing conflict had a significant negative impact on the human rights situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, the trend of violent attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, as well as attacks by Palestinian militants against Israelis, had already increased in the first nine months of the year to record levels, and spiked sharply after October 7.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of:

1) With respect to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank: arbitrary or unlawful killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the Palestinian Authority; arbitrary arrest or detention;

serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious high-level corruption; serious restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence; violence or threats of violence motivated by antisemitism; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and existence of the worst forms of child labor.

2) With respect to Hamas in Gaza: unlawful killings; disappearances; severe physical abuses and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment by Hamas; unjust detentions; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees; unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including reportedly

unlawful or widespread civilian deaths or harm, disappearances or abductions, physical abuses, conflict-related sexual violence or punishment; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified detentions of journalists, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive limitations on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; inability of citizens to change governance peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious widespread corruption; serious restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence motivated by antisemitism; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and existence of the worst forms of child labor.

3) With respect to Israeli security forces in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: arbitrary or unlawful killings; enforced disappearance; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; harsh and life-threatening prison or detention conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative;

serious abuses in a conflict, including widespread civilian deaths or harm, enforced disappearances or abductions, forcible transfers of civilian populations, torture, physical abuses, conflict-related sexual violence or punishment; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence and on the right to leave the occupied territories; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting Palestinians.

4) With respect to Palestinian civilians against Israeli civilians in the West Bank: unlawful killings; physical abuses; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting Israelis.

5) With respect to Israeli civilians against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank: unlawful killings; physical abuses; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting Palestinians.

Palestinian Authority authorities took some steps to identify and punish officials accused of committing human rights abuses, but human rights

groups criticized Palestinian Authority officials for not taking sufficient action or implementing measures against officials implicated in human rights abuses. This lack of response raised concerns about accountability.

There were no legal or independent institutions capable of holding Hamas in Gaza accountable for acts of terror, and impunity was widespread. Several militant groups with access to heavy weaponry, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad, also operated with impunity in and from Gaza.

Israeli authorities operating in the West Bank took some steps to identify and punish officials accused of committing human rights abuses, but human rights groups frequently asserted authorities did not adequately pursue investigations and disciplinary actions related to human rights abuses against Palestinians, including actions to stop or punish violence and acts of terror committed by Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

Israeli authorities operating in Gaza took no publicly visible steps to identify and punish officials accused of committing human rights abuses. Human rights groups frequently criticized authorities for not pursuing investigations and disciplinary actions related to human rights abuses against Palestinians.

This report covers the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and East Jerusalem territories that Israel occupied during the June 1967 war. The United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 and continues to do so today.

Language in this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status

matters to be negotiated between the parties to the conflict, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the borders between Israel and any future Palestinian state.

The Palestinian Authority exercised varying degrees of authority in restricted areas of the West Bank due to the Israeli Defense Force's continuing presence, none over Palestinian residents in Gaza due to Hamas exercising de facto control, and none over East Jerusalem due to Israel's extension of Israeli law and authority to East Jerusalem in 1967 and an Israeli prohibition on any Palestinian Authority activity anywhere in Jerusalem. Oslo Accords-era agreements divided the West Bank into three territorial areas: Areas A, B, and C. West Bank Palestinian population centers mostly fell into Areas A and B, with Palestinian agricultural lands and rural communities in Area C. The Palestinian Authority had formal responsibility for administration and security in Area A, which constituted the smallest portion at 18 percent in the West Bank, but Israeli security forces frequently conducted security operations there. The Palestinian Authority maintained administrative control in Area B, while Israel and the Palestinian Authority shared security in Area B, which constituted 22 percent of the West Bank. Israel retained both administrative and security control of Area C and designated most Area C land as either closed military zones or settlement zoning areas.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were numerous reports that Israeli and Palestinian governmental forces or their agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

On September 5, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel, published a report examining the use of force by Israel and Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Gaza from May 2021 to July 31. The report determined that neither the Israeli government nor Palestinian armed groups took sufficient measures to avoid civilian casualties. The report further concluded that in the killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was shot by an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldier in May 2022, Israeli forces had used lethal force without justification under international human rights law.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights activists accused Palestinian Authority security forces (PASF) of using excessive force against the Palestinian Authority's (PA's) political opponents.

In a June 24 report, Amnesty International noted that two years after

Palestinian dissident Nizar Banat died in PASF custody, PA authorities had yet to thoroughly investigate Banat's death or hold those responsible to account. Human rights groups and activists raised concerns during the year over the impartiality and fairness of the judicial process in the trial of 14 officers implicated in Banat's arrest and death.

There were significant concerns that Hamas authorities in Gaza carried out politically motivated killings. For example, Hamas sentenced 25 individuals to death in Gaza as of November 30, according to the quasi-governmental Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), including 13 death sentences issued for collaboration with Israel. By law, the PA president had to ratify each death sentence, but in practice Hamas carried out executions without ratification.

Israeli security forces (ISF) and settlers killed 509 Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including at least 121 children during the year, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The UN office noted that this was the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since UNOCHA began recording casualties in 2005.

Reports from various NGOs highlighted concern over the Israeli government's approach to investigating Palestinian fatalities and holding IDF members accountable. In a joint report published in June, Yesh-Din, Ir Amim, HaMoked, Combatants for Peace, and other Israeli NGOs stated that

79 percent of complaints against Israeli soldiers for alleged harm to Palestinians went uninvestigated. Similar concerns were raised regarding Israel's police force, including the border police. The NGOs reported that complaints filed to the Department of Internal Police Investigations resulted "almost exclusively in dismissal and further shielding of violent border police officers" and that allegations of border police harassment against Palestinians added to the accountability gap. When investigations did occur, they reported, only 21.4 percent advanced, and only 0.87 percent led to indictments. They alleged that any convictions usually resulted in lenient sentences.

On June 13, Israeli military prosecutors closed the investigation into the January 2022 death of U.S. citizen Omar Assad without bringing charges against any ISF personnel. Members of the Netzah Yehuda battalion of the IDF had pulled Assad, age 78, a Palestinian American, from his car as he was traveling home and detained him, applying a blindfold, gagging him, and binding his wrists, according to media reports. Assad was found dead shortly after the soldiers left the scene, but the Advocate General's Corps stated that no causal link was found between the soldiers' conduct during the detention and Assad's subsequent death. Rights groups criticized the investigation's findings, citing the PA medical examiner's report as showing that Israeli security forces' treatment of Assad induced high levels of stress that directly caused a heart attack and death. Israeli press reports noted that his gagging could have impeded Assad's breathing and his ability to

request help.

On November 29, Israeli forces in Jenin killed four Palestinians, including a boy, age eight. When asked to comment on the unverified footage showing the boy's death, Israeli military officials responded that unnamed suspects had hurled explosive devices toward IDF soldiers, who then responded with live fire and hit the alleged suspects (for more information on conflict-related killings, see section 1.i.).

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of PA authorities during the year in the West Bank. There were numerous reports during the year of disappearances by or on behalf of Hamas de facto authorities or other Palestinian armed groups in Gaza. There were numerous reports during the year of disappearances by Israeli security forces in the West Bank and Gaza, mostly related to the conflict that began on October 7 (see section 1.i.).

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

PA law prohibited torture or use of force against detainees, but international and local human rights groups reported that torture and abuse remained a problem, and the PA had yet to establish a protocol for

preventing torture. The ICHR reported receiving 92 complaints of torture or mistreatment against the PA and 86 complaints against Hamas during the first six months of the year.

According to Palestinian NGO Lawyers for Justice (LFJ), torture regularly occurred in PA-controlled detention centers in the West Bank, particularly in the PA's Intelligence, Preventive Security, and Joint Security Committee detention facilities in Jericho. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that Hamas' Internal Security in Gaza and the PA's Intelligence Services, Preventive Security, and the Joint Security Committee, as well as the respective police forces, used violent tactics, solitary confinement, forcing detainees to hold painful stress positions for long periods, beating, punching, and flogging. Victims also reported being cut, forced to stand on broken glass, and being sexually assaulted while in custody. Courts in the West Bank, according to LFJ, did not convict any PA detention center personnel of mistreatment of prisoners. Courts in Gaza did not convict any prison employees for mistreatment. According to the ICHR, there was no information on individual officers being held accountable for abuse.

According to Palestinian media, on June 18, PA intelligence officers arrested Yahya Farah Qasim, a member of the Student Council at Birzeit University, due to his political activism at the university. During his detention, Qasim allegedly endured severe physical and mental torture.

According to the ICHR, the International Commission to Support Palestinian

People's Rights, and the Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights, Muhammed al-Sufi, a Muslim preacher critical of Hamas' links to Iran, died within hours of being assaulted in a Hamas-run detention facility in April. According to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, the Forensic Medicine Department in Gaza city informed the family that the forensic report emphasized that the cause of death was arteriosclerosis. Palestinian rights groups argued the death could have been caused by torture and warranted an investigation.

A number of NGOs reported Israeli security forces often employed torture and other ill-treatment of Palestinian detainees. A July report from the NGO Save the Children found the majority of the 228 former child detainees it surveyed from across the West Bank experienced physical and emotional abuse in Israeli detention, including being beaten (86 percent), threatened with harm (70 percent), and hit with sticks or guns (60 percent). The NGO found some children reported sexual violence and abuse, including being hit or touched on the genitals, and 69 percent reported being strip searched. According to the report, 70 percent said they suffered from hunger while in detention, and 42 percent of children reported they were injured by Israeli security forces during their arrest.

Amnesty International reported that on October 31, Israeli authorities extended by one month the "state of emergency in prisons" which granted the Ministry of National Security what Amnesty referred to as "virtually unconstrained powers...to impose cruel collective punishment measures

such as cutting off water and electricity for long hours, effectively allowing for the intensification of cruel and inhuman treatment of detainees, in violation of the prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment.”

There were credible reports that ISF members employed interrogation practices ruled illegal by the Supreme Court.

The NGO Public Committee against Torture in Israel reported that “exceptional measures” used by Israeli security personnel against Palestinian security detainees in the West Bank included beatings, forcing detainees to hold a stress position for long periods, threats of rape, painful pressure from shackles or restraints applied to the forearms, sleep deprivation, and threats against families of detainees. Since October 7, NGOs reported that prison conditions for Palestinians in Israeli jails have deteriorated, and abuses reported include physical assaults, limited access to medication, and disruptions to water and electricity. The Palestinian Authority’s Commission for Detainees and the Palestinian Prisoners Club highlighted instances of severe mistreatment, including physical and verbal abuse. Amnesty International documented testimonies and video evidence indicating torture and ill-treatment, including severe beatings and deliberate humiliation by Israeli forces.

Data published quarterly by the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) indicated that as of December 31, Israel was holding 137 Palestinian children in detention facilities for security-related offenses. According to Military Court Watch

(MCW), 49 children were held in administrative detention as of the end of the year. The IPS transferred 68 percent of child detainees to prisons inside Israel. MCW stated that more than 67 percent of Palestinian children detained in the West Bank reported being subjected to various forms of physical abuse during arrest, transfer, or interrogation by Israeli authorities. MCW reported that most children were arrested in night raids, and that Israeli security forces used physical abuse, strip searches, threats of violence, hand ties, and blindfolds. According to MCW, 26 percent of children reported being placed in solitary confinement as part of their interrogation process.

On September 20, the Lod District Court postponed a hearing to extend Ahmad Manasra's solitary confinement, citing a deterioration in his health. Subsequently, he was transferred to a mental health unit at Ayalon prison. Manasra was convicted of attempted murder at the age of 14. Amnesty International reported that although Israeli courts subsequently found that Manasra did not participate in the stabbings, he was serving a nine-and-a-half-year sentence for attempted murder and was in solitary confinement since November 2021 (for more information on conflict-related physical abuse, punishment, and torture, see section 1.i.).

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in prisons and detention facilities in the West Bank and Gaza, whether run by PA, Hamas, or Israeli authorities, were reportedly poor,

largely due to overcrowding and infrastructure problems. NGOs reported all prisons in the West Bank and Gaza lacked adequate facilities and specialized medical care for detainees and prisoners with disabilities.

Abusive Physical Conditions: There were periodic deaths in prisons and detention facilities in the West Bank and Gaza and limited remedial action to prevent them. PA prisons were overcrowded and lacked ventilation, heating, cooling, and lighting systems conforming to international standards. PA security services used separate detention facilities. Conditions for women were similar to those for men. Lawyers for Justice reported that many Palestinian university students arrested and detained during the year reported abuse after being transferred to the PA's Jericho Central Prison, including backward bending, prolonged standing, beating on the feet with a stick, and solitary confinement lacking proper ventilation and amenities.

In Gaza, according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, at least two prisoners died in Hamas-run prisons and rehabilitation centers: one, allegedly because of severe physical abuses, within hours of his arrest; and a second in unidentified circumstances. No official investigation was conducted.

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reported that Palestinian detainees' health conditions in Israeli jails and detention facilities deteriorated early in the year, and deteriorated further after the conflict that began October 7. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI),

Bimkom, Ir Amim, Yesh-Din, and other local NGOs reported that Israel's government had implemented new punitive measures aimed specifically at Palestinians in prisons, including the imposition of harsher living conditions and increased and violent prison checks. Rights groups also reported transfers of detainees without notice and claimed Israeli authorities at times used transfer practices punitively against prisoners engaging in hunger strikes. On May 2, hunger striker Khader Adnan died while in Israeli detention. Palestinian prisoners faced punishment, including confiscation, beatings, and torture, and reduced food and medical provisions, as reported by human rights groups including the Palestinian Prisoners Club. NGOs and local and international media outlets reported that from October 7 through December 31, six Palestinians died while in Israeli custody, four from the West Bank and two from Gaza. The Israeli government reported that investigations into whether these deaths were linked to abuse or medical neglect by Israeli authorities continued at year's end.

Administration: According to NGOs, procedures designed to hold employees and administrators accountable in PA detention, Hamas detention, and Israeli-run facilities in the West Bank and Gaza rarely, if ever, led to accountability for serious abuses.

Independent Monitoring: In the West Bank, the PA permitted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to detainees to assess treatment and conditions. The ICRC continued its regular visits to

detention and interrogation facilities. Human rights groups, humanitarian organizations, and lawyers indicated, as in previous years, there were some difficulties in gaining access to specific detainees held by the PA.

In Gaza, Hamas granted the ICRC and the ICHR access to Palestinian detainees to assess treatment and conditions. Prior to October 7, human rights organizations conducted monitoring visits with some prisoners in Gaza, but Hamas denied permission for representatives of these organizations to visit high-profile detainees and prisoners. Hamas did not grant the ICRC and other groups access to Israeli and international hostages held in Gaza since the October 7 attack, except when Hamas turned over some hostages to the ICRC during a humanitarian pause in fighting.

The Israeli government permitted visits by independent human rights observers to detention facilities it operated in the West Bank until October 7, but since then Israeli authorities had not permitted the ICRC or other human rights groups to visit Israeli detention facilities in the West Bank, Gaza, or Israel. Palestinian families and human rights groups reported delays and difficulties in gaining access to specific detainees earlier in the year, and since October 7, Israel had not permitted NGO or family visits to Palestinian detainees.

For further information on the treatment of Palestinians in Israeli prisons as well as prison conditions in Israel, see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Israel.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The Palestinian Basic Law, which applied in the West Bank and Gaza, prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention, and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court.

Israeli authorities applied separate and thereby unequal legal regimes to prosecutions in the West Bank based on the nationality of the defendant. Israeli authorities tried Israelis living in West Bank settlements under Israeli civilian law in the nearest Israeli district court inside the Green Line established following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Israeli authorities tried Palestinians in the West Bank under military law in Israeli military courts. Israeli military law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in military court, but there were broad exceptions for so-called security-related offenses. Israeli military law allowed the indefinite administrative detention without charge or trial of Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza, whether they were detained or imprisoned within Israel, or within the West Bank or Gaza, for so-called security-related offenses. NGOs reported that in isolated instances, Israeli authorities had used administrative detention to detain Israeli citizens, including settlers in the West Bank, and in most cases the detentions were limited to a few months. In the West Bank, Israeli security forces routinely detained Palestinians for several hours and subjected them to interrogations, according to human

rights groups.

Israeli authorities also did not always apply the same laws to all residents of Jerusalem, often treating Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem differently than and thereby unequal to Israeli citizens.

NGOs and Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem alleged Israeli security forces disproportionately conducted enforcement actions, including arrests, detentions, raids, and interrogations, in Palestinian neighborhoods, particularly Issawiya, Silwan, Jabal Al Mukaber, Sheikh Jarrah, and Jerusalem's Old City, as compared to West Jerusalem (for more information on conflict-related arbitrary arrests and detentions, see section 1.i.).

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

PA law generally required a warrant for arrest and provided for prompt judicial determination of the legality of detention. There were exceptions that allowed for arrests by the PA without a warrant. PA law allowed police to hold detainees for 24 hours if there was sufficient evidence to charge a suspect and for up to 45 days with court approval. PA law required that a trial start within six months of the arrest or authorities were required to release the detainee. PA authorities generally informed detainees of the charges against them, although sometimes not until interrogation. Bail and conditional release were available at the discretion of judicial authorities. PA authorities granted detainees access to a lawyer. PA courts consistently

respected the right to counsel to indigents charged with felony offenses. Indigent defendants charged with misdemeanors often did not receive counsel, although NGO efforts to represent indigent juveniles and adults in misdemeanor cases were at times successful.

LFJ and other NGOs reported that the PASF isolated some detainees from outside monitors, legal counsel, and family throughout the duration of interrogation, effectively holding them incommunicado. There were reports that prison administrators denied some detainees visits from family members. The PA's Military Intelligence organization investigated and arrested PASF personnel from all PASF branches and civilians suspected of "security offenses," such as terrorism.

In Gaza, Hamas detained many persons during the year without giving them recourse to legal counsel, judicial review, or bail. According to the ICHR, as of November, at least 60 Palestinians in Gaza were subjected to unjust detentions during the year. Hamas regularly referred civilian cases to the Hamas-run military judiciary in violation of the Palestinian Basic Law and tried them under the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Revolutionary Code of 1979. There were also instances in which Hamas retroactively issued arrest warrants for Gaza residents already in custody.

Israeli citizens who committed crimes within the West Bank were subject only to Israeli law and could only be tried in civilian courts within Israel.

Israel prosecuted Palestinians from the West Bank in military courts, which

according to MCW had a conviction rate of 96 percent. NGOs criticized the practice of treating Israeli and Palestinian residents of the West Bank under different legal systems, stating that international humanitarian law permitted it only on a temporary basis in a situation of military occupation.

Israeli security forces relocated most Palestinian prisoners detained in the West Bank or Gaza to detention facilities inside Israel. Some human rights groups, including MCW, claimed the country's detention of the majority of convicted Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza in prisons inside Israel was a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and raised concerns that relocations made it more difficult for the family members of Palestinians to visit their loved ones in detention.

Israeli authorities generally provided Palestinians held in military custody with access to counsel, but detainees often obtained lawyers only after initial interrogations, according to NGOs. According to MCW, many Palestinian detainees were not permitted to see their lawyer until they appeared before an Israeli military court. MCW reported that Israeli authorities did not always inform Palestinian detainees of the reasons for arrest at the time of arrest.

According to MCW, 72 percent of Palestinian child detainees continued to be forcibly transferred or unlawfully detained in prisons located outside the West Bank, which MCW stated was in violation of international law. Under Israeli law, children as young as 12 could be prosecuted in Israeli military

courts or under Israeli military law.

There were reports that the ISF arrested Palestinian children at night in their homes instead of issuing summonses. Israeli authorities stated their policy was to post notification of children's arrests within 48 hours, but senior officers could delay notification for up to 12 days. An Israeli military commander could request that a judge extend this period. On March 2, HaMoked submitted an updated petition to the Supreme Court, reiterating its previous argument before the court that Israeli security forces should normally issue a summons via a parent or legal guardian to bring Palestinian children in for interrogation, and that night arrests should be used only in exceptional and severe cases.

Israeli authorities stated their policy was to provide written notification concerning arrests of Palestinian children to parents when they arrested a child at home, but HaMoked reported that between January 1 and December 15, out of 150 Palestinian children arrested at home, none received a summons prior to arrest. Israeli military law – applied to Palestinians – did not require the presence of a parent or guardian during interrogations, according to Parents Against Child Detention, while Israeli juvenile law – applied to Israeli citizens – did, unless police anticipated that the adult's presence would compromise the investigation.

Israeli authorities granted or denied bail to Palestinians detained for security offenses on a case-by-case basis, based on the severity of the alleged

offense, status as a minor, risk of escape, or other factors, but according to MCW, in most cases bail was denied.

Under Israeli military law, authorities could postpone a detainee's first meeting with a lawyer for up to 10 days from the arrest for a so-called security offense. The law permitted Israeli authorities to hold a so-called security detainee for 14 days before review by a district court judge, to deny access to counsel for up to 21 days with the attorney general's approval, and to hold detainees indefinitely, subject to semiannual district court reviews and appeals to Israel's Supreme Court.

Following October 7, Israel declared a state of emergency, resulting in amendments that expanded detention laws. On October 24, a new Israeli regulation extended the period for denying legal counsel to individuals suspected of "security offenses." These Israeli regulations empowered Shin Bet heads or high-ranking military officers to order 30-day detentions without court approval, extendable to 90 days with a judge's approval. These changes impacted mostly Palestinians. On November 7, the Israeli government introduced emergency regulations enabling detention without access to a lawyer for up to 90 days.

Arbitrary Arrest: According to the ICHR, HRW, and other human rights NGOs, the PA, Hamas, and Israeli security forces committed extensive arbitrary or unjust detentions throughout the year in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Between January 1 and December 16, LFJ

documented 812 instances of “political detentions” by PA security services in the West Bank and represented 168 clients subject to “political detentions” in cases mainly pertaining to social media, political affiliation, and participation in protests.

The ICHR received 208 complaints of arbitrary arrests and detentions by the PA in the West Bank, and 60 complaints of unjust detention by Hamas in Gaza. The PASF and Israeli security forces on occasion detained Islamic bloc-affiliated students from Palestinian universities, especially ahead of student union elections. The detained students were rarely charged, leading to accusations that the arrests were politically motivated. There were numerous reports that the PA improperly detained Palestinian journalists and arrested Palestinians who posted online criticism of the PA.

Hamas committed widespread detentions in Gaza, particularly of civil society activists, Fatah members, journalists, those accused of criticizing Hamas, and persons suspected of ties to Israel. At least 13 journalists were subjected to harassment, confiscation of equipment, forced removal of content, and detention. Following popular calls for protests in Gaza on July 30 and August 5, the ICHR documented a number of individuals either arbitrarily arrested or threatened with arrest.

According to B’Tselem, HaMoked, the Israeli NGO Human Rights Defenders Fund (HRDF), and other NGO reports throughout the year, Israeli security forces in the West Bank arbitrarily arrested and detained NGO employees

and Palestinian protesters and activists, particularly those demonstrating against killings of Palestinians or demolitions. Israeli forces also detained journalists covering protests against settlement activity.

The HRDF reported that Israeli forces abducted or arbitrarily detained 28 human rights defenders and Palestinian shepherds between April 23 and May 3 in the South Hebron Hills. According to the HRDF, the IDF failed to provide a reason for the arrests.

Throughout the year, Israeli authorities issued or extended various movement and communications restrictions against PA Jerusalem Governor Adnan Gheith. On May 30th, Israel renewed its decision to ban Gheith's entry into the West Bank. The orders included house arrest in Jerusalem, a ban on entry into the West Bank, a ban on communicating with 51 Palestinian political figures, including President Abbas, and a ban on participation in any events or activities in Jerusalem.

Pretrial Detention: It was unclear how many Palestinians were held in pretrial detention in West Bank and Gaza prisons, but there were widespread civil society reports of PA, Hamas, and Israeli security force detentions without charge or trial. Some PASF personnel detained Palestinians outside appropriate legal procedures, including without warrants and without bringing them before judicial authorities within the required time, according to human rights groups.

PA authorities held some prisoners detained by order of Palestinian governors in lengthy pretrial detention, according to complaints received by the ICHR. The ICHR reported 13 administrative detention cases pending governors' decisions, as of November 30. Palestinian detainees faced barriers to their ability to challenge in court the legal basis or nature of their detention and to obtain prompt release and compensation if found to have been unlawfully detained. Detainees held in PA custody faced delays in the enforcement of court rulings regarding their detention, especially regarding the PA's obligation to release suspects who had met bail.

It was unknown how long detainees in Hamas custody were held in pretrial detention or what legal means, if any, Hamas used to detain individuals.

The Israel Prison Service reported to HaMoked that at year's end, Israel held 3,291 Palestinians in administrative detention. HaMoked stated those figures did not include the hundreds or perhaps thousands of Palestinians from Gaza. Media outlets reported that thousands of Palestinians were detained during Israeli military operations after October 7, and held by the Israeli military in unknown conditions and locations and with no external oversight or access.

Palestinians held by Israeli military authorities in administrative detention had no right to trial and could only challenge their detention before a military court judge. In cases in which the evidence substantiating the charges against a detainee was classified, the detainee had no means of

examining the evidence (or, in some cases, the charges) to challenge the detention. Palestinian administrative detainees regularly engaged in hunger strikes as a means of drawing attention to their cases and seeking release or improved detention conditions.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The PA basic law provided for an independent judiciary. According to the ICHR, the PA judicial system was subject to pressure from the security agencies and the executive, undermining judicial performance, independence, and impartiality. PA authorities did not always execute court orders.

In July PA President Abbas announced the reversal of a 2022 decree intended to establish a Supreme Council for Judicial Bodies and Authorities with significant powers to review legal cases, chaired by Abbas himself. The decree had sparked criticism over its impact on the independence of the Palestinian judiciary. Some experts considered the move superficial, as Abbas already chaired a similar body supervising the judiciary. Human rights organizations expressed concerns about the independence of the judiciary and the potential influence of political factors on legal matters within the PA.

In Gaza, Hamas did not respect fair trial provisions and failed to provide many detainees with access to family and legal counsel. Prosecutors and

judges appointed by Hamas operated de facto courts, which the PA considered illegal. The judiciary was reportedly heavily influenced by Hamas, and cases that attracted public debate, particularly murders, were tried quickly, undermining due process.

The NGO Save the Children asserted Israeli military courts in the West Bank did not meet international fair trial standards, did not generally provide either rehabilitation or deterrence, and refused to consider alternative sentencing such as probation or community service. According to an Israeli response in April to a freedom of information act request filed by the HRDF and the Movement for Freedom of Information, 99.6 percent of charges filed against Palestinians in Israeli military courts ended in guilty plea bargains. The HRDF assessed that defendants pled guilty to crimes because they perceived a plea as the only means by which to avoid prolonged detention and a 96 percent conviction rate of such cases taken to trial.

Trial Procedures

PA law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right in areas of the West Bank under its authority, but its mandate was limited to Palestinians detained by the PASF. Trials were public, except when the court determined PA security, foreign relations, a party's or witness's right to privacy, a survivor of a sexual offense, or an alleged so-called honor crime required protection. If a court ordered a session closed, the decision could be appealed to a higher PA

court. Amnesty International reported PA political and judicial authorities sometimes did not adhere to basic due process rights, including failing to promptly charge suspects or failing to dismiss cases when prosecution witnesses did not appear at hearings.

PA law provided for legal representation at public expense, if necessary, in felony cases during the trial phase. During the investigation phase, defendants only had the right to observe, although legal representation was permitted to object to specific questions and raise arguments with the prosecutor's approval.

Hamas in Gaza followed the PA's criminal procedure law but implemented the procedures inconsistently, marked by frequent due process shortfalls.

Israeli military law allowed Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza to be detained or imprisoned by Israeli security forces indefinitely without charge, trial, information regarding the accusations against them, or disclosure of the alleged evidence to the defendants or their counsel. Israeli authorities could not base convictions solely on confessions either in military or civilian proceedings. In military courts, defendants and their lawyers did not have the right to see all evidence against them, as defendants did in civilian court proceedings.

Save the Children reported in July that although military courts had stated on several occasions that minors could consult with a lawyer prior to

interrogation, in practice this rarely happened, in part because so many children were arrested at night when they could not easily contact a lawyer. A local observer noted that Palestinian detainees reportedly often declined Israeli-funded and appointed counsel due to lack of trust in the counsel's independence. Israeli military court proceedings were conducted in Hebrew. While Palestinian defendants had the stated right to simultaneous interpretation, human rights organizations observed that the availability and quality of Arabic interpretation was insufficient. MCW reported that at the conclusion of their interrogations, most detained Palestinian children were shown or made to sign confession documents written in Hebrew, a language most of them could not read. In some cases, confession documents written in Hebrew differed from the Arabic transcript of the defendant's interrogation. Israeli authorities claimed interrogations of Palestinians took place only in Arabic and that authorities submitted no indictments based solely on a confession written in Hebrew.

Defendants could appeal military court verdicts through the Military Court of Appeals and petition Israel's Supreme Court. According to NGO reports, Israeli military courts rarely acquitted Palestinians charged with security offenses, although they occasionally reduced sentences on appeal.

NGOs and various lawyers who defended Palestinians in Israeli courts argued that the structure of military trials, which took place in Israeli military facilities under tight security with Israeli military officers in uniform

as judges, prosecutors, and court officials, severely restricted Palestinian defendants' rights to public trial and access to counsel, and that its structural biases against Palestinians resulted in the military court maintaining a nearly 100 percent conviction rate.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

NGOs reported political prisoners or detainees were held by the PASF, Hamas, and the ISF in the West Bank and Gaza. In the West Bank, media and NGOs reported the PASF arrested Palestinians for political reasons. There was no reliable estimate of the number of political prisoners the PA held in the West Bank. Some of these individuals, labeled "collaborators" for allegedly working with or engaging with Israelis on political initiatives the PA did not support, reported direct and indirect threats of violence from Palestinian political parties, affinity organizations, and militant groups, some with possible ties to the PA, and damage to personal property and businesses. There were reports that the families of those targeted were pressured to disown them, which would decrease risks for attackers to injure or kill them, and that they and their family members were denied medical treatment in PA health facilities.

Media reports indicated an increase in political arrests in the West Bank following university student council elections held in the spring. Lawyers for Justice documented 200 cases of arrests and summonses by the PASF. The targets of these actions included university students, former detainees, and

political activists.

In Gaza, from January through September Hamas detained 60 Palestinians due to political affiliation, public criticism of Hamas, or suspected collaboration with Israel and held them for varying periods, according to the ICHR.

Some human rights organizations stated that Palestinian “security prisoners” held by Israeli authorities were political prisoners, whom Israel detained for prolonged periods without charge under permissive administrative detention laws. Israeli authorities reportedly detained some Palestinians because of the content of their social media posts. The Israeli government described Palestinian security prisoners arrested in the West Bank and Gaza as those convicted or suspected of “nationalistically motivated violence.”

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that as of December 31, Israeli authorities held at least 19 Palestinian journalists in custody in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. According to the CPJ, on December 22, Israeli soldiers arrested Palestinian journalist Mohamed al-Rimawi with Awda TV of the Radio and Television Commission, after a raid on his home in the West Bank city of Beit Rima, according to his outlet, the Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate, and the PA-run Palestine TV.

The PA permitted the ICRC access to its detention and interrogation

facilities. Neither Israel nor Hamas permitted the ICRC to access detainees after October 7 through the year's end.

f. Transnational Repression

Not applicable.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

The Israeli government confiscated land and conducted hundreds of demolitions of Palestinian property in the West Bank, including in Areas A, B, and C, for lack of Israeli-issued permits, construction in areas designated for Israeli military use, and location of structures within the barrier's buffer zone, and in East Jerusalem. Several Israeli and Palestinian human rights groups and the United Nations asserted that confiscations, demolitions, and evictions constituted collective punishment that violated the Fourth Geneva Convention and were part of Israel's efforts to forcibly dislocate communities on pretexts of "military training" and "law enforcement." The threat of destruction of homes and sources of livelihood, in addition to confiscation and demolition of property, created a coercive environment pressuring persons to leave their areas of residence and restricting freedom of movement and access, according to UNOCHA and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

According to the Israeli NGO Peace Now, during the year 26 new outposts

(settlements considered illegal under Israeli law) were established, 21 Palestinian communities were forcibly displaced from their homes, and 12,349 housing units were advanced in West Bank settlements, which the group reported were the highest numbers of each incident since the NGO began recording data in 1993. In addition, 15 previously illegal outposts were legalized, and approximately three billion shekels (more than \$822 million) in public funds was allocated for roads in settlements. The group noted the government eliminated required political approvals for much of the settlement planning process and amended the law to allow Israelis renewed access to areas in the northern West Bank from which Israel had withdrawn in 2005.

Human rights NGOs reported Israeli authorities often placed insurmountable obstacles against Palestinian applications for construction permits in Israeli-controlled Area C and noted this was more frequent after October 7. Obstacles included the requirement that Palestinian applicants document land ownership despite the absence of a uniform land registration process, high application fees and long processing times, and requirements to connect housing to often unavailable municipal infrastructure. Israeli authorities charged fees for demolishing a home, according to the United Nations, which at times prompted Palestinians to destroy their own homes to avoid the fees.

UN monitors observed that Israeli authorities routinely used military orders

to bypass the regular planning process and carry out demolitions and confiscations in Area C with little or no prior notice.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli authorities demolished 1,171 Palestinian structures as of December 30, displacing 2,261 residents, according to UNOCHA. UNOCHA reported those figures included 891 Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which Israeli authorities demolished citing the lack of building permits. B'Tselem, HRW, and the United Nations stated the Israeli government rarely approved Palestinian construction permit requests.

According to the West Bank Protection Consortium (WBPC), affected communities did not receive demolition orders until demolition operations were already underway, which prevented them from objecting or responding to the orders in advance. NGOs stated that other military orders authorized Israeli authorities to seize mobile structures without prior notice.

Following a May 2022 Israeli Supreme Court ruling unanimously dismissing the petitions filed by Masafer Yatta residents against their eviction from a restricted military zone in the South Hebron Hills, Reporters without Borders (RSF) reported Israeli authorities had escalated their pressure on Masafer Yatta residents. This gave rise to RSF concerns about possible forcible transfers in violation of international humanitarian law. UNOCHA reported Israeli forces tightening movement restrictions in Masafer Yatta, prompting residents to leave, with 7 percent displaced since July – more than 80

persons, half of them children – while the remaining 1,000 Palestinians faced a forcible transfer risk. Since October 7, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) noted numerous settler violence incidents, including assaults and property damage, with Israeli forces sometimes involved. The NRC petitioned the Israeli High Court on November 16, citing attacks on communities like al Mufagara, Ar Rakeez, Jinba, Sfai, Tuba, and al-Majaz.

Israel's Civil Administration conducted punitive demolitions of structures of families of Palestinians who carried out or allegedly carried out attacks on Israelis or their families, according to human rights groups, media reports, and UNOCHA. UNOCHA reported that during the year Israeli authorities carried out 11 demolitions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem officially cited by Israeli authorities as punitive. Israeli authorities reported a total of 13 home demolitions in the West Bank between October 19 and year's end that it referred to as "demolitions of terrorists residences" by Israel's Central Command.

According to media reports, on January 25, Israeli forces sealed for demolition the home of the family of Udai Tamimi in the Shuafat refugee camp in East Jerusalem, accusing Tamimi of killing an Israeli soldier and seriously wounding a civilian guard in October 2022 at a checkpoint near the camp. Following these attacks, Tamimi attempted another attack at a checkpoint and was killed by Israeli security personnel near the West Bank settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim.

According to Israeli press, on February 12, Israeli forces sealed the home of the family of Hussein Qaraqe in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of A-Tur, ahead of its subsequent demolition, displacing his parents and two brothers. Qaraqe rammed a vehicle into an East Jerusalem bus stop, killing three individuals including two children, before he was shot dead at the scene of the attack.

According to the NGOs Ir Amim and Bimkom, municipal authorities in Jerusalem often placed unsurmountable obstacles against Palestinian residents who applied for construction permits, including by failing to incorporate community needs into zoning decisions, requiring that they document land ownership despite the absence of a uniform land registration process, imposing high application fees, and requiring residents to connect housing to municipal infrastructure that was often unavailable or inaccessible.

NGOs asserted Israeli authorities maintained a policy of limiting construction that would maintain or create a contiguous line of Palestinian neighborhoods between the West Bank and Jerusalem. *Haaretz* reported that in April, the Jerusalem municipality withdrew support for the first neighborhood to be built specifically for Palestinian residents since 1967, reportedly over political concerns of the mayor of Jerusalem. Senior municipal officials reportedly said the reversal was to avoid building in open areas. Israeli law did not prevent non-Jews from purchasing housing units,

but cultural, religious, and economic barriers as well as segregated homeowners' associations posed persistent obstacles to integrating existing neighborhoods or establishing new integrated neighborhoods, according to civil society representatives.

According to the Israeli government, all land ownership cases were assessed individually by an administrative committee, which was subject to judicial review.

The law facilitated the resolution of claims by Jewish owners to land owned in East Jerusalem prior to 1948 but did not provide an equal opportunity for Palestinians to claim land they owned in the then British Mandate. Jewish landowners and their descendants, or land trusts representing the families, were entitled to reclaim property they had abandoned in East Jerusalem during fighting prior to 1949, while Palestinians who abandoned property in Israel in the same period had a right to compensation only but not to reclaim the property.

Between 1948 and 1967, Jordanian authorities housed Palestinians in some properties that Jewish owners reclaimed after Israel occupied East Jerusalem in 1967. Palestinian residents involved in legal disputes over many of these properties had only limited protection as tenants under Israeli law. Ir Amim alleged that settler organizations with Israeli government backing obtained ownership rights to these assets despite lacking historical ties to the properties, after which they could evict the

Palestinian occupants.

The general custodian, a Ministry of Justice official responsible for managing evictions, often collaborated with settler organizations, according to Ir Amim. On July 11, the Israeli National Police (INP) forcibly removed the Ghaith-Sub Laban family from their residence in Jerusalem's Old City, enabling the Atara Leyoshna settler organization to take over the property. Ahmad Sub Laban, the eldest son, told the media that the INP broke down the front door of the home early in the morning and expelled the family and a group of activists who were present to express solidarity. The family had rented the house from the government of Jordan from 1953 until 1967, but in February the Supreme Court ruled to revoke the family's protected tenancy status and permit the eviction in favor of the settler organization.

In Gaza, before October 7, media outlets reported that Israeli border guards enforced a 330-yard buffer zone within Gaza around the length of the 36-mile border wall separating it from Israel, which some Palestinians continued to farm in or collect rubble in, despite the risk from Israeli military operations that resulted in some Palestinians being injured or killed in the buffer zone. The Israeli government announced after the October 7 attacks that it would be expanding its buffer zone to provide greater security for the residents of communities in southern Israel to return to their homes. According to local press reports, in early December, Israeli security forces began destroying Palestinian-owned buildings and neighborhoods a

kilometer deep into northern Gaza and in eastern Gaza City to begin construction on an expanded “buffer zone” that would be accessible only to IDF personnel.

The Department of State’s *Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act Report* to Congress, released publicly in July 2020, can be found on the Department’s website at <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress>.

h. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

In the West Bank, PA law generally required the attorney general to issue warrants for entry into and searches of private property, but PA judicial officers could enter Palestinian houses without a warrant in case of emergency. NGOs reported it was common for the PA to harass family members for alleged offenses committed by an individual. Although the Oslo Accords restricted the PASF to operations only in Area A of the West Bank, at times they operated in Areas B, C, and H2 without official Israeli permission, including to harass individuals sought for political activity or to search their homes.

The Arab Center for Social Media Advancement (7amleh) reported that the PASF could access the private information of citizens by obtaining a search and seizure warrant from the Attorney General’s Office. LFJ reported that

Palestinian authorities detained and summoned activists, journalists, and students based on opinions they expressed on social media platforms.

In Gaza, Hamas frequently interfered with personal privacy, family, and homes, according to reporting from local media and NGO sources. Gaza-based Palestinian civil society organizations and social media practitioners stated Hamas authorities monitored the internet activities and communication of Gaza residents without appropriate legal authority and intimidated and harassed them. There were reports that Hamas searched homes and seized property without warrants. They targeted critics of their policies, including journalists, Fatah loyalists, civil society members, youth activists, and those whom Hamas' security forces accused of criminal activity. They demanded passwords and access to personal information and seized personal electronic equipment of detainees. According to the ICHR, in several instances, Hamas detained individuals for interrogation and harassment, particularly activists attempting to organize protests against Hamas during the summer months.

The ISF frequently raided Palestinian homes in response to what it asserted were security threats, including in areas designated as under PA security control, according to media and PA officials. These raids often took place at night, which ISF officials stated was due to operational necessity. ISF officers of lieutenant colonel rank and above could authorize entry into Palestinian private homes and institutions in the West Bank without a

warrant, based upon their determination of military necessity. NGOs reported it was common for the ISF to harass family members for alleged offenses committed by an individual.

According to NGOs, the PA accessed, collected, or used private communications or personal data unjustly, targeting individuals based on expression or political affiliation, often without appropriate legal authority.

The PASF could access the private information of citizens by obtaining a search and seizure warrant from the Attorney General's Office, 7amleh reported, and did not require a court order.

The Israeli government used biometric data collection, facial recognition, noncooperative location tracking, and predictive technologies to surveil the population of the West Bank and activists and human rights defenders, according to media, NGOs, and human rights activists. On May 2, Amnesty International reported Israel's use of an experimental facial recognition system to track Palestinians and enforce movement restrictions, expanding surveillance in Hebron and East Jerusalem. According to Amnesty, Israeli forces conducted facial scans at checkpoints and entered them into government databases without consent. Amnesty reported that in East Jerusalem, Israeli police expanded their city-wide surveillance system across the Old City, allowing Israeli authorities to identify protesters and keep Palestinians under constant observation.

On March 5, the Knesset extended the “temporary” Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law through March 2024. The law prohibited the interior minister from granting residency or citizenship status to Palestinians from the occupied territories who were married to Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel and banned reunification of citizens or residents of Israel with spouses from “enemy states,” including Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran.

Thousands of Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza were living in Israel, including Jerusalem, on temporary stay permits because they did not qualify for family reunification under the Citizenship and Entry law. Some of these West Bank or Gaza Palestinians were living with their spouses in East Jerusalem without legal status. Authorities did not permit Palestinians who were abroad during the 1967 war or whose residency permits the government subsequently withdrew to reside permanently in Jerusalem. The law allowed for the entry of spouses of Israelis on a “staying permit” if the male spouse was 35 or older and the female spouse 25 or older, for children up to age 14, and for a special permit for children ages 14 to 18, but they were not eligible for residency or citizenship. Human rights organizations called on the Israeli government to repeal the law and resume processing of family reunification applications.

Israel’s Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) maintained a policy allowing eligible foreign spouses to receive a permit to enter the West Bank if they were seeking to formalize their marital status

through the previously existing family unification procedures. COGAT stated it would review applications for spouses to formalize status that were transferred by the PA, but according to HaMoked the PA did not regularly transfer such applications because it maintained that Israel did not accept them. HaMoked alleged that the PA and COGAT had a tacit understanding that applications would not be processed.

Israeli authorities did not allow children in Gaza to be reunited with a parent in the West Bank.

i. Conflict-related Abuses

Significant conflict-related abuses were documented throughout the duration of the reporting period, especially on and after October 7. Human rights groups reported extensive and in many cases unprecedented conflict-related abuses, and alleged the commission of war crimes, by Israel, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other Palestinian militant groups. From January through September, incidents of extremist settler violence against Palestinians and their property in the West Bank reached their highest daily average figures since the United Nations started recording data in 2005, and dramatically increased after October 7.

Killings: On May 9, Israel launched an airstrike on Gaza targeting three senior commanders of PIJ, which was followed by a five-day escalation of fighting between Israel and PIJ. This operation was in response to extensive

rocket fire from PIJ towards southern Israel the previous week, following the death of PIJ activist Khader Adnan after a lengthy hunger strike in an Israeli prison. According to UNOCHA, the escalation resulted in at least 34 Palestinians killed in Gaza, with at least 12 being civilians, including six children, and 190 left injured, including 64 children. Three of these casualties, including two children, were from errant PIJ rockets, according to Amnesty International. Inside Israeli territory, rocket fire claimed the lives of two individuals – one Israeli and one Palestinian worker from Gaza. According to the IDF data, PIJ launched 1,468 rockets during the May escalation, 1,139 of which crossed over into Israeli territory; 290 failed rockets fell within the Gaza Strip; and 39 rockets landed in the sea. Israeli missile defense systems intercepted more than 95 percent of the rockets.

According to UNOCHA, 237 Palestinians and 30 Israelis were killed in conflict-related violence prior to October 7, including 199 Palestinians and 26 Israelis killed in the West Bank, 34 Palestinians killed in Gaza, and four Palestinians and four Israelis killed inside the Green Line. UNOCHA also reported that during the year prior to October 7, 9,378 Palestinians were injured by Israeli security forces and Israeli settlers. According to the Israeli government, prior to the October 7 attacks, 23 Israelis were killed and 134 Israelis were injured in terror attacks from Gaza, the West Bank, in Jerusalem, and inside the Green Line.

On October 7, thousands of Hamas, PIJ, and other armed terrorists breached

the security fence between Gaza and Israel by land, sea, and air via paragliders, and massacred an estimated 1,200 Israelis and foreigners, including 36 children. At least 843 of the victims were civilians, and more than 1,941 Israelis and foreigners were injured in the terrorist attacks. The attack began with Hamas firing a barrage of more than 3,000 rockets toward Israel from Gaza. Terrorists attacked military bases, clashed with security forces mostly in southern Israel, and simultaneously infiltrated civilian communities. During the attack, terrorists committed multiple abuses, including physical assault, rape, and other sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) atrocities. The attackers killed hundreds of civilians and injured many more at the Supernova music festival near Kibbutz Re'im, and kidnapped approximately 253 Israelis and foreigners, including men, women, and children (for more information on abuses committed in Israel during the attack, see section 1.i. of the Israel report).

An unknown number of Palestinians were killed and injured in Gaza because of misfired rocket launches from within Gaza. HRW reported in November that their investigation of the October 17 al-Ahli Hospital explosion indicated that evidence pointed to a misfired rocket from a Palestinian militant group, but that further investigation was needed to determine who was responsible and to determine whether the laws of war were violated. HRW also reported that Gaza-based authorities have previously impeded investigations of such incidents.

By year's end, Israel's military response included heavy aerial bombardment and ground operations and resulted in the death of more than 21,000 Palestinians in Gaza, 40 percent of them children, according to the United Nations, which relied on information from the Hamas-led Ministry of Health in Gaza. The United Nations also reported an estimated 7,000 Palestinians were believed to be buried under rubble or decomposing in the streets where they were killed by year's end. The United Nations reported that more than 56,000 Palestinians were injured, and up to 1.9 million Palestinians in Gaza were displaced out of a total population of 2.3 million. UNOCHA reported that given the large scale of killing and the war-time difficulties in identifying bodies, bodies were often buried unidentified in mass graves. Media sources also reported 170 Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza by year's end.

Israeli forces conducted aerial bombardment and shelling of civilian areas, resulting in the killings of civilians in hospitals, ambulances, residential areas, schools, and internally displaced persons (IDP) shelters. Hamas used civilian population centers and locations, including medical facilities, to launch rockets, store weapons, and hold hostages. Thousands of rockets fired by Hamas and other armed groups in Gaza towards Israel failed to leave the Strip, killing civilians and destroying buildings (for more information on rockets that reached Israel, see section 1.i. of the Israel report). Hamas and other armed groups, in both Gaza and the West Bank, executed individuals suspected of spying for Israel.

The United Nations reported that 2023 was the deadliest year on record in the West Bank before October 7, and there was additionally a significant intensification of killings and other incidents of violence in the West Bank following October 7. According to UNOCHA, 310 Palestinians, including at least 81 children, were killed between October 7 and December 30 in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Palestinian fatalities rose to more than four per day as the IDF increased its military operations in the West Bank dramatically. Israeli security forces were responsible for 97 percent of Palestinian fatalities after October 7.

UNOCHA and numerous international and Israeli human rights NGOs reported that IDF soldiers either directly participated in, aided, or idly witnessed violent settler acts. According to UNOCHA, IDF soldiers were involved in or present at approximately 50 percent of incidents of settler violence. International and Israeli NGOs reported that certain settler attacks involved settlers who joined an IDF reserve unit or donned a military uniform, which they say blurred the line between the IDF and violent settler groups.

On November 28, following a raid of the Jenin refugee camp, Israeli forces reportedly shot in the head and killed Adam Samer al-Ghoul, age eight, followed by shooting Basil Suleiman Abu al-Wafa, age 15, in the chest, and killing him. A CCTV video appeared to show Adam Samer al-Ghoul attempting to hide behind a car before being shot. The Palestine Red

Crescent Society reported that Israeli forces subsequently prevented paramedics from reaching Palestinians wounded during this raid. An IDF statement did not speak to the circumstances of al-Ghoul's killing, and instead simply reported that, "Earlier today, during IDF activity in the Jenin Camp, a number of suspects hurled explosive devices toward IDF soldiers. The soldiers responded with live fire toward the suspects and hits were identified."

Abductions: On October 7, Hamas, PIJ, and other armed terrorists abducted 253 Israelis and foreigners from Israeli communities, a nearby music festival, and army bases. Amnesty International reported that video footage showed men in military gear taking away civilians with their hands tied behind their back. Hamas, PIJ, and other terrorists held 253 Israeli and international hostages in Gaza, including at least 30 children, women, and elderly persons, and at least 19 soldiers. After the release of four hostages in October, and following an agreement with Israel secured through international mediators, in November Gaza-based militants released 105 Israelis and citizens of other nations in exchange for the release of 240 Palestinian prisoners and detainees held in Israeli prisons. According to a *New York Times* analysis, the freed Palestinians included 107 children. As of year's end, there were 136 Israelis and foreigners held hostage by Hamas, PIJ, and other terrorists in Gaza, including 132 hostages abducted on October 7 and an additional four hostages who were held hostage in Gaza before October 7. The exact whereabouts of the hostages remained unknown. The ICRC reported that

by year's end it did not receive proof of life for any of the remaining hostages. At least 23 hostages were believed to have been killed in captivity, according to press reports by year's end, including three hostages who were mistakenly killed by Israeli security forces.

In early December, Israeli forces reportedly took Palestinian men and boys from their homes in northern Gaza in search of Hamas or other militants and transferred some of them to Israeli prisons. At year's end, the ICRC was working on approximately 4,000 cases of Palestinians from Gaza who had disappeared and estimated nearly half to still be detained by the Israeli military. The ICRC reported only in a handful of cases had it received proof of life. Human rights groups expressed concern that Israel warned civilians who did not flee areas under military evacuation orders that they could be considered a partner in a terrorist organization and reported that Israeli forces arbitrarily detained military-age men in areas of northern Gaza.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: Media reported hostages held by Hamas following the October 7 attacks faced severe physical, psychological, and sexual abuse equivalent to torture, and were deprived of sufficient food, water, and medical treatment. In December, The Hostages and Missing Families Forum reported women and men were sexually abused or assaulted by Hamas while in captivity. The New York Times reported in December that hostages were deprived of adequate food, some receiving only a single piece of bread per day for weeks. Hostages were denied

medication and urgently needed medical care. Media outlets reported that physicians treated released child hostages found they had been drugged by their captors, including with ketamine, and were suffering from withdrawal. Children abducted by Hamas reported being forced under death threats to watch videos of Hamas atrocities from October 7 (for more information on sexual abuse committed by Hamas and other terrorists in Israel on October 7, see section 1.i. of the Israel report).

Human rights organizations, HaMoked, the Public Committee against Torture in Israel, Physicians for Human Rights in Israel, and Adalah raised concerns about systemic torture and inhuman treatment of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prison facilities and in Israeli detention facilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories after October 7. According to these organizations, the abuse included severe physical assaults, sexual harassment and intimidation of children and both male and female detainees, as well as other acts of humiliation. They highlighted 19 cases of reports of severe abuse, including the deaths of six Palestinians held in Israeli custody since October 7, with four from the West Bank and two from Gaza. They raised concerns regarding allegations that abuse or medical neglect by prison personnel could have caused several of those deaths. The Palestinian Prisoners Club reported the deaths of Omar Hamzeh Daraghmeh, Arafat Hamdan, Abed Rahman Mara'i, Thaer Abu Assab, Raja Samour, and Majed Zakol in Israeli prisons, allegedly due to beatings or medical neglect by IPS staff. Israeli authorities opened investigations into

these cases, according to media reports (for more information on abuses in Israeli prisons, see section 1.c. and section 1.i. of the Israel report).

The Palestinian Prisoners' Commission issued a report alleging that "since the beginning of the Israeli bombardment and ground invasion in Gaza, the Israeli army arrested hundreds of Palestinians in a barbaric and unprecedented manner and has published pictures and videos showing the inhumane treatment of detainees."

Palestinian detainees held by Israeli authorities in the Gaza Strip reported to local and international news outlets that they were severely assaulted, beaten in their genitals, deprived of food, water, and toilet facilities, stripped naked, exposed to cold temperatures, sexually harassed, threatened with rape and physical harm, deprived of sleep, and subjected to cigarette burns, electric shocks, and other forms of torture and severe physical and mental abuse.

On November 19, according to media reports, Israeli soldiers detained Palestinian poet Mosab Abu Toha while he was in transit to the Rafah border crossing in an attempt to evacuate from Gaza with his family, including his son, age three, who was a U.S. citizen, according to press reports. Toha reported that he was forced to walk with other detainees with their hands in the air before Israeli forces abducted and detained him. He also stated that he was forced at gunpoint to strip his clothes and underwear, and later transferred to an Israeli prison where he was beaten

and subjected to humiliating treatment before his release on November 21.

Local and international press reported that on December 7, IDF soldiers forcibly removed dozens of Palestinian men from their homes in northern Gaza, stripped them of their clothes, loaded them onto trucks and took them to various military-run camps where the men were interrogated, beaten, tortured, and some were killed before the rest were released to southern Gaza with no charges against them. Survivors stated that after IDF soldiers ordered civilians to leave their homes in a neighborhood of Beit Lahiya, handcuffed and stripped of their clothes, IDF soldiers burned down many of their homes in front of the men. According to Israeli press, the men were loaded into military trucks and taken to a beach where they were left for hours, then taken to another beach for interrogations. During these interrogations, the detained men were reportedly beaten, including in the genitals. After the interrogation, some were released back to Gaza, and approximately 100 were taken to a military detention facility. At the facility, detainees were reportedly subjected to a punishment of having to hold their hands above their heads for several hours, and any detainees who lowered their arms were beaten. Detainees testified that other inmates held at the facility died next to them because of the abusive conditions.

On October 12, three Palestinians were detained by a group of Israeli settlers and troops in the West Bank. The victims alleged that the IDF soldiers took them to a barn near the village of Wadi al-Seeq, stripped and

bound them, physically attacked them, and urinated on them. In response to this incident, the IDF stated, “the manner in which the arrest was carried out, and the conduct of the force in the field, was contrary to the standards expected of soldiers and commanders in the IDF,” and announced that it had dismissed the commander of the unit that led the arrest and opened an investigation into the incident. No results were announced by the end of the year.

On October 31, in the South Hebron Hills, seven West Bank laborers were filmed being stripped, blindfolded, handcuffed, beaten, and dragged by IDF soldiers, after allegedly trying to enter Israel without a permit. Multiple videos of the incident show an IDF soldier pressing his boot on the face of one of the Palestinian detainees. In response to the incident, the IDF stated that “the [soldiers’] conduct that emerges from these scenes is grave and inconsistent with the values of the IDF. The incidents are under investigation...one soldier has been dismissed from reserve service.” As of year’s end, there was no information available that any indictment was forthcoming for this conduct.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: The Israeli military campaign resulted in an intensification of the longstanding humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Prior to October 7, the United Nations reported Israel allowed an average of approximately 500 trucks into Gaza daily carrying food, fuel, and commercial goods, which aid groups noted was insufficient to meet the humanitarian

needs of Gaza's population. Between October 7 and December 31, Israel allowed an average of fewer than 100 trucks into Gaza daily.

Following the Israeli Defense Minister's October 9 announcement that Israel was "imposing a complete siege on Gaza" and would block electricity, food, water, fuel, and other goods into Gaza, human rights groups stated that Israel was deliberately depriving Palestinian civilians of humanitarian goods in what the groups characterized as an act of collective punishment. In subsequent weeks, Israel allowed limited humanitarian aid to arrive through the Rafah crossing with Egypt, and later through the Israeli crossing of Kerem Shalom, subject to Israeli approval. Israel blocked fuel into Gaza until November 15, when Israel permitted limited fuel supplies to enter Gaza for specified humanitarian purposes, citing concerns that Hamas and other militant groups would use fuel for military purposes.

On October 25, Oxfam International issued a report finding that just 2 percent of food that would have been delivered before the closure of October 9 had entered Gaza. In addition to citing Israel's restrictions on humanitarian aid delivery into Gaza, Oxfam cited Israeli airstrikes destroying bakeries and grain mills, agriculture, farmland, and water and sanitation facilities. Oxfam also reported that by cutting off Gaza's electricity, Israel further disrupted food production and capacity in Gaza that relies on refrigeration, crop irrigation, and crop incubation devices. Continuing hostilities, including airstrikes, artillery fire, ground operations, and naval

bombardment, as well as Israeli government-issued evacuation orders resulted in civilian casualties and drove displacement into increasingly crowded areas with few or no available resources.

More than 1.9 million persons (more than 85 percent of the population) inside of Gaza were displaced, many in overcrowded shelters with limited access to food, water, and toilet facilities. The World Health Organization and others documented the spread of communicable diseases, including smallpox, diarrhea, and influenza. Much of the basic infrastructure inside of Gaza, including electricity and water networks, was damaged or destroyed. Individuals attempting to flee the conflict were unable to depart Gaza, with the only operating crossing, Rafah Crossing, largely restricted to foreign citizens and urgent humanitarian cases.

Famine posed a major threat, with UNOCHA assessing that the entire population of Gaza faced an “imminent risk of famine,” with 576,600 Palestinians at catastrophic – or starvation – levels by year’s end. The United Nations’ hunger monitoring system, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, reported on December 21 that virtually all households in Gaza were skipping meals every day, and in four out of five households in the northern governorates and in half of the displaced households in the southern governorates, individuals went days and nights without eating. The report noted that throughout the Gaza Strip, adults often went hungry so that children could eat, and that “the most likely scenario” was “the entire

population in the Gaza Strip would be at ‘crisis or worse’ levels of hunger by February 7, 2024.” The United Nations and the World Food Program reported that 97 percent of households in the north of Gaza and 83 percent of households in the south had inadequate access to food. The United Nations reported humanitarian agencies expressed concern about the ability to provide food to northern Gaza due to fear for the safety of their staff. In southern Gaza, local groups expressed concern individuals sheltering in private residences might not have access to adequate food.

Hamas and ISF military activity in and around hospitals, as well as the forced evacuation of patients and staff, impeded civilians’ access to medical care. Wounded persons inside Gaza experienced significant difficulties accessing care. By year’s end, the United Nations assessed that only a third of hospitals in Gaza were operational, and the World Health Organization (WHO) stated there were no operating hospitals in northern Gaza. The United Nations reported that many of the hospitals were only partially operating, and many housed internally displaced persons seeking shelter. The WHO estimated there were more than 350,000 infectious diseases cases in Gaza at year’s end.

Israel-based NGO B’tselem issued a report in May alleging that Israel had deliberately deprived Palestinians in the West Bank of adequate water resources, citing restrictions on the PA’s ability to transport water within the West Bank while Israel continued to export water freely from inside the

country to West Bank settlements.

Palestinian sources said Israeli forces routinely denied injured Palestinians access to emergency medical assistance, which in some cases contributed to fatalities in Gaza and the West Bank. According to *The New York Times* on December 14, Doctors Without Borders reported that a father in Jenin had carried his son, age 13, to a hospital “because Israeli armored cars blocked ambulances,” adding that the boy had been pronounced dead on arrival. Isam Baker, the director of the Jenin Hospital, said Israeli forces had set up checkpoints outside the hospital during some raids, complicating efforts to deliver medical care to the injured.

In Gaza, Hamas interfered with the movement of civilian and humanitarian workers inside Gaza, setting up roadblocks and attempting to block humanitarian workers inside buildings to prevent them from leaving areas that Israel announced it would bombard. At times during the conflict, Hamas interfered with international efforts to evacuate Palestinians and international workers out of Gaza.

Israel’s military response to attacks by Hamas on October 7 disrupted communications, leaving Gaza’s 2.3 million Palestinians repeatedly isolated by communications blackouts. Israeli airstrikes destroyed the offices of a Palestinian communications company on October 8 and the office of the main Palestinian telecommunications company, Paltel, on October 9. On October 23, the Israeli Ministry of Communications updated a press release

noting Israeli plans for “shutting down of cellular communications and internet services to Gaza.” Israeli airstrikes damaged telecommunication installations, destroying key communication lines, hubs, and main switches on several occasions, resulting in significant degradation to the network and regularly constraining coverage to less than 10 percent of preconflict network capacity. The blackouts significantly impacted humanitarian efforts, the work of international organizations, emergency ambulance and medical services, reliable reporting of human rights violations and civilian casualties, access to life-saving information and banking services, and information flow in and out of Gaza.

According to an Access Now report, internet traffic across Gaza decreased by more than 80 percent throughout October, as a result of attacks on civilian telecommunications infrastructure (including cell towers, fiber optic cables, and ISP offices), restrictions on access to electricity, denial of service, restrictions on entry of fuel to run generators, and technical disruptions to telecommunications services.

UNOCHA reported that between October 7 and year’s end, 144 UN staff and 312 health workers had been killed, along with 40 civil defense workers killed while on duty helping to dig victims out of rubble. UNOCHA also reported that as of December 8, only one rescue vehicle was reportedly operational in all of Gaza, due to attacks on humanitarian workers and infrastructure, and other constraints on aid workers.

According to a *Wall Street Journal* analysis, by mid-December nearly 70 percent of Gaza's homes, two-thirds of Gaza's schools, and about half of its buildings had been damaged or destroyed, including apartment buildings, libraries, universities, bakeries, restaurants, shopping malls, theatres, hospitals, factories, mosques, and churches. An analysis of satellite images published by the BBC reported that by year's end, 350 schools and some 170 mosques and churches had been damaged or destroyed.

The WHO documented 820 attacks on health care in the West Bank and Gaza during this reporting period by all parties to the conflict, resulting in 620 deaths, more than 600 of whom were Palestinians killed in Gaza since October 7. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) reported that since October 7, more than 90 percent of its premises in Gaza, including schools and health-care facilities, were hit or impacted by munitions during the conflict. Between October 7 and year's end, 142 UNRWA staff were confirmed killed.

Some Palestinians died because of Israel's shut-off of electricity and fuel to hospitals, including five premature babies and 40 ICU and kidney patients at al-Shifa hospital. UNOCHA reported at least four babies died following Israel's forced evacuation of Al Nasr hospitals and were found weeks later decomposing in their hospital beds.

Haaretz reported that by year's end, based on interviews with Israeli officials, Israeli soldiers had begun to set fires to homes in Gaza, following

direct orders from their commanders. The IDF stated in response to *Haaretz's* report that “detonating and destroying buildings is done with approved, appropriate means,” and that “actions that were carried out in different ways during the war will be looked into.”

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate reported in December that more than 100 journalists had been killed in Gaza since the outbreak of the conflict with Hamas on October 7. The CPJ estimated that as of December 31, at least 70 Palestinian journalists and four Israeli journalists were killed in conflict since October 7. The CPJ noted this death toll was more journalists than had ever been killed in a single country over an entire year. The report did not identify whether these individuals were killed while conducting their journalistic activities but noted the CPJ was investigating the circumstances of the deaths and “is particularly concerned about an apparent pattern of targeting of journalists and their families by the Israeli military.” The CPJ noted in at least two cases, journalists reported receiving threats from Israeli officials and IDF officers before their family members were killed. According to the CPJ, three journalists were reported missing, including two Palestinians from Gaza, Nidal al-Waheidi and Haitham Abdelwahed, with their whereabouts still unknown by year's end.

The Palestinian Center for Development of Media Freedoms (MADA) also reported on December 11 that Israeli bombardment destroyed three headquarters of media institutions since October 7: Agence France-Presse,

Al Jazeera, and Al Sharq TV.

The Israeli government and media outlets stated Hamas and PIJ used civilian infrastructure for cover for military purposes, including offices within such infrastructure and tunnel infrastructure beneath them. During the year, prior to and after the October 7 attack, Gaza-based militants indiscriminately launched rockets at Israel. The IDF responded to the rocket launches with airstrikes. After October 7, local and international media reported that Hamas and PIJ militants positioned their rocket launch sites adjacent to schools, playgrounds, and hospitals, launching rockets from densely populated civilian locations toward civilian targets in Israel.

On October 13, the Israeli government ordered 1.1 million Palestinians living in the north of Gaza and humanitarian relief organizations to move south of Wadi Gaza within 24 hours, including those sheltered in UN facilities who had evacuated their homes in the first few days of the war. Subsequently, media reported the IDF acknowledged more time would be required to evacuate civilians, although it continued operations in northern Gaza and insisted that civilians had to move south. Amnesty International and other NGOs reported that the evacuation order could not be considered an effective warning and might amount to forced displacement of the civilian population. The International Committee of the Red Cross warned that the instructions for the population of Gaza City to immediately leave their homes, “coupled with the complete siege explicitly denying them food,

water, and electricity,” was not compatible with international humanitarian law. Subsequently Israel issued evacuation orders in other areas throughout Gaza, which NGOs reported resulted in repeated forced displacement of Palestinians.

On November 9 UNOCHA reported that clashes and shelling on and around the roads used for evacuations continued, endangering evacuees, with reports of corpses alongside the road. Media outlets reported multiple instances of Israeli strikes killing and injuring evacuees on convoys moving from northern to southern Gaza. UNOCHA, which relied on data from the Hamas-led Ministry of Health in Gaza, reported more than a third of Palestinian casualties as of November 15 were in the areas south of where the Israeli military had ordered evacuations.

International and Israeli human rights NGOs reported that settler violence, on certain occasions, included the use of “vacate or die” ultimatums, in which violent Israeli settlers threatened to kill Palestinians unless they left their homes. As of December 15, settler violence and harassment led to the displacement of 1,442 Palestinians in the West Bank, according to UNOCHA. Sixteen Palestinian villages had been vacated since October 7 due to settler violence and harassment, according to Israeli human rights NGO B’Tselem. On October 28, armed settlers entered Susiya and threatened to kill Palestinian villagers if they did not leave within 24 hours. According to the WBPC and press reports about the incident, the perpetrators wore IDF

uniforms and held numerous Palestinian residents at gunpoint, telling them they would kill them if they did not vacate within a day's time.

Settler violence contributed to the displacement of West Bank Palestinians. According to the WBPC, on December 4, Israeli settlers entered the Zanuta community in South Hebron and demolished Palestinian homes, the local school, and other structures that formed the community. The demolition followed settler attacks that in recent weeks forcibly displaced the entirety of Zanuta's Palestinian population, according to the WBPC. The WBPC asserted that the goal behind destroying Zanuta's infrastructural base was to prevent the displaced Palestinian residents from resettling in Zanuta.

The United Nations and international groups expressed concern about individuals in Gaza being arrested or detained by the ISF without trial, including at crossings intended to facilitate the movement of civilians from areas subject to bombardment. UNOCHA stated that medical personnel, including employees of the Palestine Red Crescent Society, were arrested or detained. Since October 7, the Israeli military detained more than 5,500 persons in the West Bank, including 184 women, 355 children, and elderly persons, according to the Palestinian Prisoners Club. According to the Palestinian Authority's Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoners Club, the arrests included individuals taken from their homes, at military checkpoints, those who surrendered under pressure, and individuals the PA characterized as being "held as hostages."

Rights groups and local and international media reported Israel also arrested and detained thousands of Palestinian workers and medical patients from Gaza with valid permits to enter Israel on October 7 who were not connected with the October 7 attacks. Workers released since then alleged they were subjected to severe beatings and electric shocks, urinated on, attacked by dogs, held for days without food or water, and had their cell phones and cash taken by Israeli security forces. Two of these workers died in Israeli custody (for more information on Palestinian workers detained in Israel, see section 1.i. of the Israel report).

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

In the West Bank, the PA basic law generally provided for freedom of expression but did not specifically provide for freedom of expression for members of the press and other media. The PA enforced legislation that NGOs asserted restricted press and media freedom in the West Bank, including through PASF harassment, intimidation, and arrest. In the West Bank, the PA actively monitored social media to pressure and harass activists and journalists. There were instances when the PA arrested and detained Palestinians because of their posts on social media. Palestinian activists reported space had narrowed for political discussion, with arrests of

opponents of the Fatah party, critics of the PA, and peaceful protesters in the West Bank.

In Gaza, Hamas severely restricted freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, through arrests, detentions, and interrogations of journalists as well as harassment and limitations on access and movement for some journalists. These restrictions led many journalists and activists to self-censor.

According to LFJ, both the PA in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza detained persons for their social media posts and brought charges of “harming revolutionary unity” and “misuse of technology.”

Israeli civil and military law severely restricted freedom of expression for Palestinian residents of the West Bank, including for members of the press and other media. NGOs and Palestinian journalists reported Israeli authorities restricted press coverage and placed limits on certain forms of expression, including restricting Palestinian journalists’ movement in the West Bank and Gaza and used violence, arrests, closure of media outlets, and intimidation, according to media reports and the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms.

The CPJ reported that between October 7 and year’s end, 72 Palestinian journalists and media workers were killed in the West Bank and Gaza, and 25 journalists were arrested by Israeli security forces, including 19 held in

Israeli custody by year's end. The CPJ also reported that two Palestinian journalists from Gaza were reported missing by year's end. The CPJ reported Palestinian journalists faced numerous assaults, threats, cyberattacks, and censorship in the West Bank and Gaza.

Freedom of Expression: In the West Bank, PA law did not explicitly prohibit criticism of the government, but media reports indicated PA authorities regularly arrested West Bank Palestinian journalists, social media activists, and protesters who criticized the PA or covered events that criticized the PA. The law authorized the PA to block websites that posted “any expressions, figures, images, films, advertising materials or anything else, which may threaten the national security, public order or public morals.” The law restricted the publication of material that endangered the “integrity of the Palestinian state.” Additionally, the law penalized individuals who authored or posted proscribed content electronically. According to NGO reports, the PASF arrested West Bank journalists and blocked websites associated with political rivals, including sites affiliated with political parties and opposition groups critical of the Fatah-controlled PA.

On July 13, the PASF detained journalist Aqil Awawdeh, a prominent radio correspondent for Quds Press in Ramallah, after he voiced criticism against statements by a PA spokesperson, who denied reports of politically motivated arrests in the West Bank. According to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, he was charged with “publishing information that incites racial

strife and slandering the Authority.” Awawdeh was charged with promoting racial strife, slandering the PA, and insulting President Mahmoud Abbas. He was released on bail of 3,000 Jordanian dinars (\$4,200) after four days in custody.

In Gaza, from January through September, Hamas authorities harassed, arrested, interrogated, and seized property from 60 Palestinians who criticized Hamas, according to the ICHR. Hamas suppressed protests against poor economic conditions in July and August, including through the use of violence against demonstrators, harassment of journalists, and unjust detentions. Media practitioners accused of criticizing Hamas, including civil society and youth activists, social media activists, and journalists, faced punitive measures, including raids on their facilities and residences, unjust detention, and denial of permission to travel outside Gaza.

Media practitioners accused the ISF of subjecting civil society and youth activists, social media activists, and journalists, to punitive measures, including raids on their facilities and residences, unjust detention, and denial of permission to travel outside of the West Bank or Gaza.

Frontline Defenders reported that on December 17, Israeli security forces unlawfully detained and forcibly disappeared human rights defender and head of Gaza’s Al Awda hospital Ahmed Muhanna. Frontline Defenders reported that after being blindfolded, stripped, and subject to several hours of interrogation and ill-treatment, he was taken to an unknown location. His

whereabouts were unknown at year's end.

According to international press reports, on October 26, Lama Khater, a freelance writer with Middle East Monitor and the Palestinian news website *Felsteen*, was arrested by the IDF in Hebron and held in administrative detention. On November 8, Khater's husband told the CPJ via a messaging app that soldiers in her cell threatened her with rape and burning of her children. The CPJ also reported they were informed by the lawyer that Khater was strip-searched and threatened with being "deported to Gaza." Khater was released in the November Israeli-Hamas prisoner exchange (for more information on the heightened risks Palestinian journalists and other media workers faced in Gaza after October 7, see section 1.i).

According to the HRDF, Israeli police in Jerusalem regularly attacked and arrested peaceful protesters who waved the Palestinian flag, and confiscated the flags despite the public security minister's explicit order to the police commissioner and high-ranking officers that the Palestinian flag could be confiscated only during demonstrations under exceptional circumstances (for more information regarding restrictions on display of the Palestinian flag in Israel, see section 2.a. of the Israel report).

Violence and Harassment: There were numerous reports that the PA harassed, detained (occasionally with violence), prosecuted, and fined journalists in the West Bank for reporting on protests criticizing the PA or for expressing their views on social media on political detention matters.

The PA occasionally obstructed the West Bank activities of media organizations and limited coverage critical of the PA. On July 12, according to MADA, Palestinian Intelligence Service personnel stopped the vehicle of journalist Jibril Sabri and seized ID cards and phones from him and fellow journalist Abd al-Rahman Hassan after they had covered a sit-in in Bethlehem against PA political detentions. The PA also had an inconsistent record of protecting Israeli and international journalists in the West Bank from harassment by Palestinian civilians or PA personnel.

In Gaza, Hamas at times detained, harassed, intimidated, and physically assaulted journalists critical of its policies, including Palestinian journalists, and banned journalists from accessing some official buildings in Gaza. Hamas infringed upon journalists' rights to freedom of speech and public assembly in at least 10 instances, according to the ICHR. Palestinian journalists were reportedly required to inform Hamas authorities of "any suspicious behavior or illogical questions outside the scope of journalistic work" and to submit a full report.

According to RSF, on August 4 Hamas-affiliated security forces verbally abused Ihab Fafous, a reporter from the daily newspaper *Okaz*, while he was covering a peaceful protest in Khan Younis in southern Gaza. On the same day, Hamas security forces arrested two journalists along with others during a demonstration at the Palestinian refugee camp in Jabaliya in the North Gaza district.

Throughout the year, there were numerous reports that Israeli authorities prevented Palestinian journalists from operating in the West Bank and Gaza. These reports included alleged harassment of and violence against journalists by Israeli soldiers.

The CPJ reported in May that 13 of the 20 journalists killed in Gaza before October 7 had been wearing or carrying press markings at the time of their killing, and that no one had been charged or held accountable for their deaths.

MADA reported that Israeli forces targeted 620 Palestinian journalists between January 1 and November 30, using live ammunition, rubber bullets, and tear gas, to deter them from covering incidents and clashes. MADA reported that Israeli forces committed 97 physical attacks on Palestinian press during the same period.

Palestinian journalists who could obtain permits to enter Israel, as well as Jerusalem-based Arab/Palestinian journalists, reported incidents of harassment, racism, and occasional violence when they sought to cover news in Jerusalem, especially in the Old City and its vicinity. On May 18, Israeli forces and settlers physically assaulted at least 10 Palestinian journalists and prevented them from covering the Jerusalem Flag March, according to MADA.

On April 4, Israeli police entered the al-Aqsa Mosque while hundreds of

Muslim worshipers were inside observing Ramadan. According to RSF and local media, Israeli police officers arrested and assaulted two media workers reporting from the al-Aqsa Mosque, Wehbe Makieh, a freelance camera operator reporting for Al Mayadeen TV, and freelance photojournalist Atta Awisat. RSF reported that Makieh and Awisat both identified themselves as journalists to authorities.

According to the CPJ, Palestinian and international journalists reporting in Israel and the West Bank faced assaults and threats from Israeli soldiers and settlers. Victims of these incidents included journalists from BBC Arabic, Sky News Arabia, the Association of Public Broadcasting Corporations in the Federal Republic of Germany, Al Jazeera English, The New Arab, and Russia Today Arabic. Mustafa Alkharouf, a journalist with Turkish state-owned Anadolu Agency, reported being assaulted by a group of Israeli Border Police officers while covering Friday prayers near al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem on December 15.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: In the West Bank, independent Palestinian media operated under restrictions. The PA prohibited calls for violence, displays of arms, and racist slogans in PA-funded and controlled official media. PA law authorized authorities to block websites that post “any expressions, figures, images, films, advertising materials or anything else, which may threaten the national security, public order or public morals.”

The law restricted the publication of material that endangered the “integrity of the Palestinian state.” According to NGO reports, PA security forces and courts regularly blocked websites. The law also penalized individuals who authored or posted proscribed content. Because of the political rivalry between Fatah and other groups, journalists in the West Bank faced threats, interrogation, detention without charge, intimidatory lawsuits, prosecutions, and bans on covering certain events, according to Reporters Without Borders.

According to MADA, on March 1, PASF dressed in civilian clothes stormed the headquarters of Ramallah-based independent Watan News Network and prevented a press conference by Palestinian political figures who were demanding political reforms and the holding of elections. PASF assaulted journalists on-site and banned them from any coverage. 7amleh reported that the PA detained and summoned activists based on their engagement on social media platforms. On the same day, the Palestinian intelligence service interrogated journalist Moath Washha about his media work. There were reports that the PA sought to erase images and video from the cameras and mobile phones of journalists whom they interviewed or detained.

In Gaza, Hamas allowed the operation of non-Hamas-affiliated broadcast media with some restrictions. For example, the PA-owned official Palestine TV continued to operate in Gaza. Hamas allowed the distribution and sale in

Gaza of daily newspapers published in Jerusalem and the West Bank on a daily basis, except when papers could not be imported because the Erez Crossing was closed.

NGOs and Palestinian journalists asserted Israeli authorities restricted their freedom of movement and ability to cover stories across the West Bank. On February 4, according to media reports, Israeli forces detained Al Jazeera correspondent Muhammad Sumreen, while he was in his vehicle covering an ISF raid on the Aqabat Jabr Refugee Camp in Jericho, allegedly using him as a human shield during the raid.

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate stated that Israel's crackdown on Palestinian journalists had increased significantly during the year. On March 3, MADA reported Israeli forces assaulted CNN photojournalist Karim Khader and other Palestinian photojournalists as they were covering weekly solidarity sit-ins in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem.

In Gaza, civil society organizations reported Hamas censored social media and persecuted political dissidents, especially for critiquing key figures within the movement, and restricted taking photographs or recording in public spaces, television programs, and written materials.

The Hamas-led de facto Ministry of Interior required regular citizens and media agencies to acquire a permit for using cameras in public spaces. On March 23, a group of Hamas police officers physically assaulted a Gaza-

based journalist, seized his electronic devices, and detained him for two days, citing his failure to obtain a permit to film.

The ISF occasionally ordered the closing of Palestinian radio stations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem for inciting behavior that could harm public safety or public order. Palestinian prisoners' rights groups reported that Israeli authorities arrested hundreds of Palestinians for "incitement to violence" on social media during the year, intensifying post-October 7, with a notable increase in the arrest of Palestinian women.

Editors and journalists from East Jerusalem and West Bank publications reported they engaged in self-censorship due to fear of retribution by Israeli authorities.

All Israeli media organizations, including those reporting from the West Bank, had to submit to the Israeli Military Censor, a unit within the IDF's Directorate of Military Intelligence, any material relating to specific security matters or strategic infrastructure matters such as oil and water supplies. Organizations were able to appeal the censor's decisions to the Supreme Court, and the censor could not appeal a court judgment.

The Israeli government regularly enacted gag orders on what it deemed to constitute sensitive security information regarding the West Bank and Gaza and continuing investigations, and it required foreign correspondents and local media to abide by these orders. According to Israeli media outlet Local

Call's reporting in August on a government response to a freedom of information request, of the 5,916 articles that the Israeli government reported during the year that were submitted to the censor in 2022, the censor interfered with the content of 990 articles and banned 159.

Libel/Slander Laws: In the West Bank, PA law criminalized libel, slander, and defamation. According to the National Commission for the Independence of the Judiciary and Rule of Law, the PA reportedly used these provisions to restrict public discussion and retaliate against journalists or political opponents. LFJ reported the PA harassed and intimidated critics to force self-censorship, subjecting them to protracted judicial proceedings. According to LFJ, on June 5 the Public Prosecutor's Office in Ramallah summoned and charged two officials from the Aman Coalition organization following the release of their report on May 17, titled *The State of Integrity and Anti-Corruption in Palestine for the year 2022*. The report highlighted alleged instances of corruption by individuals in the Palestinian President's Office. Court proceedings were continuing at year's end.

In the West Bank, the Jordanian law criminalizing blasphemy or "defaming religion" remained in force and violations could result in a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

In Gaza, Hamas enforced the PA laws criminalizing libel, slander, and defamation.

Israeli law allowed for criminal legal proceedings based on private complaints of libel, slander, or defamation, in addition to civil legal proceedings. The maximum sentence was up to one year's imprisonment. According to peace and human rights activists, Israeli organizations and individuals filed criminal complaints of libel, slander, and defamation against journalists, activists, and NGOs in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, primarily those who were Palestinian or supporters of Palestinians.

According to the HRDF, Israeli individuals, Israeli state authorities, and pro settlement NGOs used civil suits, including allegations of defamation, violation of privacy, and copyright infringement, to discourage public criticism of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

National Security: Human rights NGOs alleged that the PA restricted the activities of journalists and those expressing dissent on national security grounds. On January 10, according to MADA, PA national security personnel prevented photographer Mohammed Turkman from covering a peaceful march in Nablus, confiscating his phone and press card. After intervention from the Journalists Syndicate, authorities returned his belongings.

MADA reported on December 11 that Israeli forces had seized and destroyed the equipment of seven journalists, one of them in Gaza. The Israeli authorities also closed two printing presses and a library in the city of Hebron and seized their equipment. Authorities issued a decision to ban pro-Hezbollah Lebanese Al Mayadeen TV, suspended its operation, and

seized its equipment. The security cabinet also announced its approval of regulations allowing the closure of foreign media outlets.

Nongovernmental Impact: In Gaza, Palestinian militant groups sought to inhibit freedom of expression, including for members of the press and NGOs, by monitoring their social media and harassing them and their families.

Internet Freedom

There were no reports of the PA and Hamas restricting or disrupting access to the internet or censoring online content in the West Bank and Gaza. Israeli security forces shut down Gaza's telecommunications system during its military operations in Gaza following October 7, leaving Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians repeatedly isolated by communications blackouts, and concomitant restrictions on fuel and electricity. Internet was generally accessible throughout the West Bank and Gaza before October 7, although only with 3G mobile service available in the West Bank and 2G in Gaza.

Since October 7, Gaza faced several prolonged internet blackouts due to infrastructure damaged during the conflict, Israeli shutdowns of Gaza's telecommunications system, and extended fuel shortages.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The respective Palestinian and Israeli authorities in the West Bank, Gaza,

and East Jerusalem limited and restricted Palestinian residents' freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. Palestinian law did not provide an unqualified right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, although it provided the right to participate in political life, both individually and in groups. The law required PA permission for protests or gatherings of 50 persons or more. In Gaza, Hamas systematically restricted Palestinians' right to peaceful assembly and association. An Israeli military order required Palestinians in the West Bank to obtain a permit for any protest involving 10 or more persons; there were no known instances of Israeli authorities granting such permits during the year.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

In the West Bank, PA law permitted public meetings, processions, and assemblies within legal limits (timing, location, nature of gathering) and for gatherings of 50 persons or more, with PA permission, and permitted private gatherings without the presence of police. According to LFJ, PA security forces selectively restricted or dispersed peaceful protests, conferences, and press events in the West Bank during the year. Several media outlets reported that on January 10, the PASF suppressed a peaceful march in the center of Nablus demanding the release of political detainees held by the PA. Dozens of Palestinian security personnel reportedly confronted the march, which included family members of the detainees and dozens of others. Participants claimed the PASF fired tear gas at the

protesters, causing one case of severe suffocation.

In Gaza, Hamas enforced PA law conferring limited protection for the right to peaceful assembly, including the right to organize peaceful demonstrations. In addition, Hamas required authorization for any public assembly or celebration in Gaza. Hamas security forces selectively restricted or dispersed peaceful protests and demonstrations in Gaza during the year. On July 30, following an online call for protests against Hamas rule and humanitarian conditions in Gaza, a few hundred Palestinians went to the streets and were met with immediate attacks from Hamas security services dressed in civilian attire. According to the ICHR, Hamas security services detained 43 Palestinians, 15 of whom sustained serious injuries. Human rights NGOs reported that Hamas forces also assaulted journalists during the protest and confiscated their equipment.

Hamas also attempted to impede criticism of its policies by imposing arbitrary demands for the approval of meetings on political or social topics. Hamas used unjust detentions to prevent some events from taking place, including political events affiliated with Fatah.

An Israeli military order covering the West Bank and Gaza required that “political” gatherings of 10 or more persons obtain a permit from the regional commander of military forces. There were no public reports of Israeli commanders granting these permits during the year. The penalty for breaching this order was up to 10 years’ imprisonment or a fine. The IDF

Central Command maintained “closed military zones” in the West Bank where Palestinians could not publicly assemble. Israeli military law prohibited Palestinians from participating in an unpermitted demonstration or march consisting of more than 10 persons, or encouraging others to engage in civil disobedience.

There were reports that Israeli authorities used excessive force against protesters in East Jerusalem. On March 3, *Haaretz* reported authorities arrested eight activists while four activists were injured during a clash between protesters and Israeli Police. The confrontation occurred during a demonstration against the pending eviction of a Palestinian family from their Sheikh Jarrah home in East Jerusalem. Police alleged the protesters attacked police officers, who responded by using clubs and “skunk water,” a noxious wastewater-based substance, against protestors.

Freedom of Association

PA law regulated Palestinians’ right to association, allowing the formation of associations and civil society organizations. NGOs reported various challenges in the registration process, including security checks by every PA security service, especially impacting those with political affiliations. The PA Ministry of Interior’s requirement for approval from each relevant ministry, conflicts with the Associations Law regarding financial reports, and hurdles arising from the PA Ministry of Interior’s insistence on changing cofounders and elected board members resulted in significant delays to the registration

process.

On November 27, Ghassan Bant, cofounder of the housing cooperative Khalil al-Rahman, reported the unlawful and politically motivated suspension of his cooperative financial authorization by the PA's Cooperative Work Authority. Legal proceedings had been initiated against this decision, with no date scheduled for a hearing by year's end.

In Gaza, Hamas attempted to prevent various organizations from operating, in contravention of PA law, including organizations Hamas accused of being Fatah-affiliated, as well as private businesses and NGOs that Hamas perceived as challenging its authority or deemed to be in violation of its interpretation of Islamic social norms. Hamas claimed supervisory authority over all NGOs, and Hamas representatives regularly harassed employees of domestic and international NGOs and requested information on staff, salaries, and activities.

Israeli authorities employed military law to label associations as "hostile organizations," detaining Palestinians for mere membership. The Defense Regulations of 1945 defined "unlawful associations," allowing restrictions on entities advocating violence, hatred, property destruction, and terrorism. Military Order 1651 extended this to those aiming to harm public security, IDF forces, or order in Israel or held areas, allowing closures for government maintenance, public order, and security. Violators were charged, with limited procedures for challenging designations. Charitable organizations

and media outlets faced closures, raids, and arrests based on this.

According to media reports, on January 7 Israeli security forces raided a meeting of students' parents in the Issawiya neighborhood of Jerusalem and prevented them from meeting. A Ministry of National Security statement indicated that the raid was ordered by the minister of national security, who said that "it is time to stop the Palestinian Authority's celebrations in Jerusalem and not allow it to hold terrorist conferences in Jerusalem."

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement

The barrier dividing the majority of the West Bank from Israel, including Palestinian communities within Jerusalem and inside the West Bank, significantly impeded freedom of movement for Palestinians. Israel added further restrictions on movement in the West Bank following the October 7 terrorist attacks, significantly impacting Palestinians' ability to access jobs, hospitals, and schools. Israeli authorities stated the barrier served to prevent attacks by Palestinian terrorists. Eighty-five percent of the still-unfinished barrier was inside the West Bank, running through Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Jerusalem and neighborhoods within

Jerusalem. UNOCHA estimated that more than 11,000 Palestinians, excluding East Jerusalem residents, resided in communities west of the barrier and had to travel through Israeli security checkpoints to reach the remainder of the West Bank.

In Jerusalem the barrier affected residents' access to their extended families, places of worship, employment, agricultural lands, schools, and hospitals, as well as the conduct of journalism and humanitarian and NGO activities. For example, restrictions on access in Jerusalem, including delays at checkpoints lasting hours, made it difficult for Palestinian patients and medical staff trying to reach the six Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem that offered specialized care. Authorities sometimes restricted internal movement in Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem and Jerusalem's Old City and periodically blocked entrances to the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Issawiya, Silwan, and Jabal Mukabber. The government stated that the barrier was needed for security reasons and restrictions on movement in Jerusalem were temporary and implemented only when necessary for investigative operations, public safety, public order, and when there was no viable alternative.

PA law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, with some exceptions. IDF checkpoints, settlements, and the barrier constrained Palestinians' movement throughout the West Bank, including

access to their farmlands, according to UNRWA, UNOCHA, and the PA. After October 7, the IDF sealed off entrances to the majority of Palestinian villages, towns, and cities in the West Bank, imposing more severe restrictions on any movement of Palestinians among them. NGOs reported that Israel's imposition of additional restrictions after October 7 exacerbated the suffering of Palestinian communities, particularly in areas within Israeli civil and security-controlled Area C, leading to the isolation of families in their homes and lands from their communities.

The IDF set up checkpoints and road closures that prevented access to olive groves in Area C of the West Bank, according to representatives of the Palestinian olive industry, the Israeli NGO Rabbis for Human Rights, and Israeli press reports. Palestinian farmers required special permits from the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) to access olive groves located between the separation wall and the Green Line. According to the Applied Research Institute Jerusalem, the ICA typically approved between 50-60 percent of all permit requests during the olive harvest season. During the olive harvest, Palestinian farmers – even those who coordinated access to their olive groves with the ICA and the PA – had difficulty accessing their land, according to human rights groups. UNOCHA estimated that 197,684 acres of olive groves would go unharvested during the year due to access restrictions and settler violence.

Prior to the October 7 attack, Hamas generally respected rights related to

movement and travel for exiting Gaza, but occasionally enforced internal restrictions near the border area, dispersing any attempted protests there. Hamas also maintained internal checkpoints at key intersections throughout Gaza.

Israel imposed significant restrictions on Palestinian movement in the West Bank, and between the West Bank and Jerusalem and Israel, citing security concerns and frequent attempted terrorist attacks. Israel imposed significant restrictions on Palestinians in Gaza from leaving the territory before October 7, and barred virtually all Palestinians from Gaza from entering Israeli territory following the October 7 attacks.

Foreigners entering the West Bank were subject to COGAT policies, revised in 2022, controlling who was able to enter the West Bank and for how long, and establishing requirements for short-term travelers. The policy generally required foreigners entering the West Bank for short-term travel to use the Allenby Bridge crossing from Jordan, rather than Ben Gurion Airport or other Israeli crossings. These rules applied to foreigners visiting Palestinian portions of the West Bank but did not apply to visits to Israeli settlements in the West Bank. While the Israeli rules for U.S. citizens who wished to enter the West Bank were revised to allow for entries via either the Allenby Bridge or other crossings, this revision did not apply to other nationalities. International and local NGOs criticized the entry policies as treating legitimate travelers differently based on national origin, and family

relationship, and because they impeded freedom of movement into the West Bank and family reunification. On October 7, the Israeli government prohibited entry into Israel from the West Bank for holders of PA ID/passports, irrespective of any other nationality they possessed, including U.S. citizenship. As of December 8, Israel rescinded this policy for U.S. citizens but not for other nationalities.

Movement within the Occupied Palestinian Territories: There was no information that the PA restricted movement within territory under its control during the year.

Hamas restricted internal movement inside Gaza in an attempt to prevent individuals from leaving populated areas or evacuating areas of Gaza under Israeli evacuation orders following October 7 and subsequent conflict. Hamas restricted movement close to the border with Israel.

Israeli authorities often deployed temporary checkpoints that prohibited travel between some or all Palestinian West Bank towns. Palestinians who lived in affected villages stated that “internal closures” continued to have negative economic effects, lowering their employment prospects, wages, days worked per month, and their children’s ability to commute to school. During periods of potential unrest, including on some major Israeli, Jewish, and Muslim holidays, Israeli authorities enacted “comprehensive external closures” that prevented Palestinians from leaving the West Bank.

Immediately after October 7, Israeli authorities imposed both internal and external closures at checkpoints throughout the West Bank, which also prevented Palestinians from leaving the West Bank to travel to Israel, Jordan or abroad. In December, UNOCHA reported that since October 7, Israeli forces implemented 49 new access and movement restrictions in the West Bank, and changed the status of 100 of the 645 pre-existing obstacles to movement in the West Bank, impeding or severely impacting the access and movement of Palestinians. UNOCHA reported the restrictions disconnected cities, villages, and vulnerable communities from one another, and disrupted communities' access to basic services and the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Israel placed restrictions on Palestinian farmers accessing their land in the so-called seam zone west of the barrier and east of the Green Line, according to human rights groups. Israeli authorities reportedly failed to adequately protect Palestinian farmers who were attempting to access and farm their land during critical periods of the plowing and harvest seasons. Beyond limiting permits for Palestinian farmers to access their lands, the ISF limited farmers' access to their private land when Israeli settlers were present and threatened violence. There were also reports that the ISF protected extremist Israeli settlers or did not intervene during their attacks against Palestinian farmers in the West Bank. During the olive harvest season, NGOs reported that ISF personnel operating the West Bank checkpoints located between Palestinian farmland and Israeli settlements barred farmers from moving farming equipment to their land, including

trucks for transporting olive harvest supplies into the area. NGOs also reported that Israeli settlers had unilaterally built roads and set up ad hoc security check points to deny Palestinians access to olive groves.

The Israeli travel permit system restricted Palestinians' ability to travel from Gaza to the West Bank, and into Israel. In October, the Israeli government suspended all 18,600 permits for Palestinians living in Gaza to enter Israel, and eventually returned them to Gaza.

Palestinian higher education officials reported that even prior to October 7, Israel virtually never granted permits for Palestinians living in Gaza to attend West Bank universities, limiting these students to universities in Gaza, which were subject to the influence of Hamas de facto authorities.

According to HaMoked, Israeli authorities required Palestinians from the West Bank who married Palestinians in Gaza and resided in Gaza to sign a "Gaza resettlement form" and permanently give up their right to move back to the West Bank.

In 2005, Israel declared access-restricted areas (ARAs) on both the coastal and land borders around Gaza, citing evidence that Hamas exploited these areas to conduct attacks or to smuggle weapons and goods into Gaza. The lack of clear information regarding the ARAs created risks for Palestinians in Gaza who lived or worked either on the Mediterranean coast or near the perimeter fence, and the ISF killed and injured scores of Palestinians who

approached the border prior to October 7. According to press reports and NGOs, no official signage existed for the line of demarcation, and official policy changed frequently (see section 1.i. for more information regarding movement restricted areas in Gaza post October 7).

Israel restricted imports of dual-use items into Gaza, including wires, motors, and fiberglass as well as Global Positioning System devices, citing Hamas' use of such technologies for rockets, drones, other weapons, and surveillance systems. After October 7, Israel significantly restricted the entry of all goods into Gaza. Prior to October 7, UNOCHA reported Palestinians in Gaza considered areas up to 1,000 feet from the perimeter fence with Israel to be a "no-go" area, and up to 3,300 feet to be "high risk," which discouraged farmers from cultivating their fields, given fears of being shot by the ISF.

According to media reports, Israel's periodic closure of major checkpoints, including for the Jewish holidays or in response to security incidents, caused disruptions in the West Bank. When Israel closed the Container checkpoint (near Bethlehem) on October 2, it cut off one-third of Palestinian residents in the West Bank living in the south, including Bethlehem and Hebron, from Ramallah and the north. Similarly, Za'tara checkpoint (near Tabuh) blocked traffic in and out of the entire northern part of the West Bank, including Nablus, Tulkarem, and Jenin, according to media reports.

In August, UNOCHA documented 565 ISF movement obstacles in the West

Bank, including East Jerusalem and excluding H2, the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron, and assessed more than half of those obstacles had a severe impact on Palestinians by preventing or restricting areas of movement to main roads, urban centers, services, and agricultural areas. UNOCHA reported that since October 7, Israeli authorities established 49 new access obstacles in the West Bank, severely limiting Palestinian movement, bringing the total number of obstacles during the year to 694.

Israeli restrictions on movement, particularly crossing Areas B or C (which made up approximately 80 percent of the West Bank), affected virtually all aspects of Palestinian life in the West Bank, including attendance at weddings and funerals; access to places of worship, employment, agricultural lands, schools, and hospitals; and humanitarian and NGO activities. There were also reports of patients giving birth at checkpoints or dying in traffic before reaching hospitals, and ambulances on the way to accidents or scenes of attacks being stopped by the IDF for hours at a time.

Israeli security forces also imposed temporary curfews confining Palestinians to their homes during arrest operations. Israel continued to restrict movement and development near the barrier, including access by some international organizations. After October 7, Israeli authorities intensified restrictions throughout the West Bank. According to *Haaretz*, The IDF imposed a complete lockdown for approximately two weeks in various Palestinian neighborhoods of Hebron. Afterwards, residents reported

receiving a notification from Israeli authorities that they could leave their homes three times a week on fixed days. While the Israeli army reported to *Haaretz* that there was no curfew in Hebron, Palestinian residents told *Haaretz* they were still subject to a curfew at night and on weekends that continued through the year's end, and which restricted or delayed service providers and ambulances from reaching Hebron neighborhoods.

PA-affiliated prosecutors and judges asserted that ISF prohibitions on movement in the West Bank, including Israeli restrictions on the PA's ability to transport detainees and collect witnesses, hampered their ability to dispense justice.

In the West Bank, Israeli military authorities restricted Palestinian vehicular and foot traffic and access to homes and businesses in the downtown H2 sector of Hebron, where approximately 22,000 Palestinians resided. Israeli security forces cited a need to protect several hundred Israeli settlers residing in the city center. According to UNOCHA, since October 7, Palestinian residents in the H2 area of Hebron were prohibited from leaving their homes. Some 7,000 Palestinians residing in the enclosed H2/Hebron area were under a strict curfew, limiting access through main checkpoints every other day. Palestinian activities in the city were completely suspended. There was no trade or education, and residents could not go to work, receive medical treatment, or visit family members. Many checkpoints were fortified with metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and

facial recognition technology, and included facilities for detention and interrogation, according to NGOs ACRI and Breaking the Silence. According to ACRI, soldiers used this technology to identify and detain human rights defenders.

The Israeli government imposed intermittent restrictions on Palestinian access to Jerusalem and certain religious sites, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, citing security concerns. Jerusalem Waqf officials reported Israeli police restricted Muslim worshippers from entering the site based on age, gender, and residency status on multiple occasions throughout the year, typically around Jewish holidays. After October 7, Israel enforced strict limitations on Palestinian worshippers at the Haram al-Sharif compound in the Old City. On Fridays, Israel permitted only 5,000 Palestinian worshippers to enter, according to the Islamic endowment. Initially, authorities restricted entry to those 70 or older, later revised to 65.

UNOCHA estimated that more than 11,000 Palestinians, excluding East Jerusalem residents, resided in communities west of the barrier and east of the Green Line, and had to travel through Israeli security checkpoints to reach the remainder of the West Bank. The barrier affected residents' access to their extended families, places of worship, employment, agricultural lands, schools, and hospitals, as well as the conduct of journalism and humanitarian and NGO activities.

Authorities sometimes restricted internal movement in Palestinian

neighborhoods of East Jerusalem and Jerusalem's Old City, and periodically blocked entrances to the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Issawiya, Silwan, and Jabal Mukabber. The government stated the barrier was needed for security reasons and restrictions on movement in Jerusalem were temporary and implemented only when necessary for investigative operations, public safety, public order, and when there was no viable alternative.

Foreign Travel: In order for Palestinians from the West Bank to travel abroad, they had to obtain "exit cards" from Israeli authorities that they could use to cross Allenby Bridge to Jordan, and were not permitted to travel from Ben Gurion Airport, absent extraordinary circumstances; Israeli citizens did not require such permits. Most Palestinians from Gaza were unable to travel abroad before or after the October 7 attacks, after which Israel intensified the closure of Gaza. After October 7, some Palestinians from Gaza, particularly those with dual nationalities, including Palestinian Americans, were permitted by Israel, Egypt, and Hamas authorities to leave Gaza through the Rafah exit.

Israel regularly denied exit permits to patients seeking medical care unavailable inside Gaza, citing security concerns, according to media and NGO reports. According to the WHO Gaza Health Access 2023 update, Israeli authorities rejected or delayed 33 percent of medical permit requests for Gazans; the refusal rate was 29 percent for Palestinian children in Gaza

in 2022. Prior to October 7, Hamas occasionally enforced movement restrictions on Palestinians attempting to exit Gaza to Israel via the Erez Crossing and to Egypt via the Rafah Crossing. Palestinians returning to Gaza, particularly through Erez Crossing, were regularly subjected to Hamas interrogations regarding their activities in Israel, the West Bank, and abroad. Prior to October 7, Hamas prevented some Palestinians from exiting Gaza based on the purpose of their travel or to coerce payment of taxes and fines.

Hamas restricted the entry of foreigners into Gaza unless a recognized local entity applied for entry permission prior to arrival. The PA restricted Gaza residents' right to freedom of movement by refusing to issue them passports on security grounds, affecting their ability to access to health care, education, and work outside of Gaza. Palestinians from Gaza could not use the Ben Gurion Airport in Israel. Israeli authorities often denied or did not respond to Palestinian applications for travel permits through the Erez Crossing. These limitations prevented some Palestinians in Gaza from transiting to Jerusalem for visa interviews, to Jordan (often for onward travel) via the Allenby Bridge, or to the West Bank for work or education. Gaza residents wishing to travel internationally via Rafah Crossing with Egypt had to register on a waitlist with Hamas authorities, which was reportedly longer than four months prior to October 7, especially in summertime. Palestinians in Gaza reported receiving messages from the Hamas Ministry of Interior informing them they had permission to travel, six

months after their planned departure date. The faster route via Rafah required a \$1,200 per person payment and usually resulted in travel permission within three days.

Palestinians in Gaza wishing to travel via the Allenby Bridge had to register with Israel's Civil Affairs Administration, obtain a letter to enter Jordan, and await permit approval from COGAT. A shuttle bus took travelers from the Erez Crossing directly to the Allenby Bridge, and travelers had to surrender their passports for the duration of the shuttle bus trip. Palestinians from Gaza traveling via Allenby Bridge could not take wheeled luggage, toiletries, phone chargers, or any larger electronic devices such as laptops and tablets.

Amnesty International and HRW reported difficulties faced by foreign workers in obtaining Israeli visas, which affected the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the West Bank and Gaza. Amnesty International and HRW also reported that prior to October 7, the Israeli government denied permits for their employees to enter Gaza from Israel.

The Israeli government continued selective revocations of residency permits of some Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. Reasons for revocation included holding residency or citizenship of another country, living in another country, the West Bank, or Gaza for more than seven years, or being unable to prove a "center of life" (interpreted as full-time residency) in Jerusalem. The Israeli government also revoked residency permits of those alleged to have "breached" allegiance or trust against Israel. In January, HaMoked

submitted a Freedom of Information Law application to the Ministry of Interior, seeking data on the revocation of permanent residency status of East Jerusalem Palestinians in 2022. The Ministry of Interior stated in response on March 9 that 81 East Jerusalem Palestinians had had their residency revoked in 2022, including 42 women and one child. HaMoked highlighted the unique status of East Jerusalem residents and their vulnerability to becoming stateless. On June 13, the Ministry of Interior confirmed a policy of refusing residency reinstatement for Jerusalem Palestinians who moved to the West Bank, leaving them potentially stateless. Palestinians possessing residency permits issued by the Israeli government, but no PA or Jordanian identity document, needed special documents to travel abroad.

Israeli authorities severely limited entry and exit of Palestinians from Gaza at the Erez Crossing to humanitarian cases, medical patients, businesspersons, and day laborers working in Israel. Erez Crossing was destroyed by Hamas on October 7 and was closed entirely since. Israel canceled virtually all permits for Palestinians to enter Israel for medical care or work, and no new permits were granted through year's end.

Border crossing closures negatively impacted thousands of Palestinians from Gaza who worked in Israel, prevented medical patients from receiving urgent treatment in Israel, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank, and disrupted supply chains for resources used to produce goods and services

and humanitarian goods.

After October 7, all crossings for Palestinian civilians were effectively sealed, until on November 1, media outlets reported that approximately 320 foreign nationals and wounded Palestinians from Gaza were able to depart via the Rafah crossing, after being granted permission from Hamas de-facto authorities, Israel, and Egypt. More than 1,300 U.S. citizens, U.S. legal permanent residents, and family members departed Gaza through the Rafah crossing into Egypt between October 7 and year's end. While additional foreign nationals were able to depart after November 1, thousands of foreign nationals in Gaza, including some U.S. citizens, were unable to access Rafah crossing by year's end due to security concerns.

At year's end, no official crossing was in operation for Palestinian civilians in Gaza to enter or exit Israel, and only a small number of Palestinians without dual national status were able to receive permission from Israel and Egypt to exit Gaza through Rafah after October 7. Media outlets reported that by year's end Egyptian border guards demanded up to \$10,000 per person to be granted permission to leave Gaza via Rafah and be added to the daily list of individuals permitted to leave. Israel also barred all international journalists from entering Gaza without an IDF escort.

Exile: NGOs reported that continued Israeli revocation of Jerusalem identity cards amounted to forced exile to the West Bank or abroad. Israeli authorities did not permit permanent residence in Jerusalem for any

Palestinians who were abroad during the 1967 war or whose residency permits the government had withdrawn. Human rights organizations called on the government to repeal the law and resume processing of family reunification applications.

e. Protection of Refugees

The PA cooperated with UNRWA in providing protection and assistance to refugees in the West Bank. In Gaza, Hamas generally cooperated with UNRWA and allowed it to operate without interference. Israeli security forces in the West Bank and Gaza sometimes cooperated with UNRWA.

In the West Bank, UNRWA's activities were impeded by Israeli military operations and incursions into refugee camps, which led UNRWA to close facilities during security operations. UNRWA reported that closures during the year increased not only in frequency, but also in duration and scale, often isolating an entire camp or Palestinian urban center, sometimes for days at a time, and bringing obstacles to medical evacuations.

UNRWA installations and services were directly impacted by ISF operations prior to October 7, with schoolchildren obliged to shelter in place during large-scale operations. UNRWA was forced to evacuate some schools and other offices due to Israeli Forces operations, particularly in Jenin.

Installations were directly hit by ammunition, both by tear gas and by live ammunition, and in some cases also by shrapnel from drone strikes. Israeli

soldiers also forcibly entered UNRWA installations: two incidents were recorded prior to October 7 and eight incidents after. Impacts of live ammunitions were found in UNRWA installations 24 times prior to October 7 and 26 times after.

After October 7, the fighting resulted in a complete halt of UNRWA's regular operations in Gaza. As of December 31, UNRWA was providing shelter, health care, nonfood items, food, and logistics and facilitation for the humanitarian response. This included sheltering nearly 1.4 million persons in approximately 155 UNRWA installations. The response faced severe challenges. Since the beginning of the conflict, 142 UNRWA staff were killed, the highest death toll of its staff during an armed conflict since the UNRWA's creation in 1949.

Access to Asylum: The law did not provide for the granting of refugee status, and neither the PA nor the Israeli government established a system for providing protection to refugees from the occupied territories. Palestinian residents of the West Bank who claimed to be in a life-threatening situation due to their sexual orientation or other reasons, such as domestic violence, did not have access to the asylum system in Israel due to Israel's claim that the 1951 Refugee Convention did not apply to Palestinians because they received assistance from UNRWA, although UNRWA's mandate did not extend to Israel. Thus many Palestinians in life-threatening situations resided in Israel without legal status. NGOs stated

this situation left those persons, who claimed they could not return to the West Bank due to fear of oppression, vulnerable to human trafficking, violence, and exploitation. Some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) Palestinians and other Palestinian asylum seekers were able to obtain a temporary permit from COGAT allowing them to stay in Israel with authorization to work and access social services. According to UNHCR, prior to the issuance of permits, COGAT requested proof of efforts to resettle in a third country.

Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers: According to UNRWA, between October 7 and December 31, up to 1.9 million persons, or over 85 percent of the population, were displaced across the Gaza Strip, many multiple times, the majority of whom were UNRWA-registered refugees prior to October 7. UNRWA noted that information on internally displaced numbers for northern Gaza and Gaza City was not updated after October 12 due to access constraints and the security situation. UNRWA reported 60 direct hits on its installations and 68 different UNRWA installations sustained collateral damage from October 7 through the end of the year, resulting in the killing of 314 IDPs and at least 1,129 IDPs injured while sheltering in those installations.

Access to Basic Services: Prior to October 7, UNRWA provided education, health care, social services, and other assistance to Palestinian refugees in areas across the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In some cases, movement

restrictions imposed by Israel, the PA, and Hamas limited access to UNRWA services and resources in the West Bank. After October 7, UNRWA suspended its regular operations in Gaza and transitioned all operations toward humanitarian and emergency response.

After October 7, Israel imposed a further tightening of access and movement restrictions across the entire West Bank. These restrictions impacted both UNRWA services and staff. Limitations on the activity of humanitarian actors increased drastically, in particular due to the partial or full closure of existing checkpoints and the added closure of entries to villages (with barriers and earth mounds) and cities across the West Bank. This made movement within the West Bank, including entry to East Jerusalem, very difficult. UNRWA reported that 470 of its employees holding a West Bank ID were unable to access UNRWA field office in East Jerusalem, thus hindering the smooth running of UNRWA operations in the West Bank.

The increase in restrictions of movements had a significant impact on UNRWA's ability to operate its services. Health and education services were especially impacted.

Widespread civilian harm and dire humanitarian and socioeconomic conditions in Gaza severely affected refugees, which comprised the majority of Palestinian residents in Gaza. Restrictions on permits to exit Gaza limited refugees' abilities to work and negatively affected job opportunities in Gaza,

leading to extremely high unemployment rates, which stood at 44 percent prior to October 7. These conditions contributed to increased levels of violence at the community level, as well as domestic violence.

Prior to October 7, the Israeli government approved UNRWA projects for only a year at a time, forcing UNRWA to invest extra time and resources in annual renewal applications for its many multiyear projects, hampering implementation and increasing transaction costs for most UNRWA projects.

Temporary Protection: The Israeli government denied Palestinian residents of the West Bank all access to the asylum system, according to UNHCR.

Israel interpreted the 1951 Refugee Convention as not applying to Palestinians because they received assistance from UNRWA, although UNRWA's mandate did not extend to Israel. Instead, Israel allowed Palestinian asylum seekers to apply for temporary stay permits, which generally allowed employment and access to the national health insurance scheme through employer contracts. In practice, however, most Palestinian asylum seekers working in Israel had insecure, informal, or no contracts at all. NGOs reported Palestinian asylum seekers had to apply to COGAT in person for a temporary stay permit. UNHCR expressed protection concerns about this process, because asylees at risk due to their LGBTQI+ identity or their experience of GBV in the West Bank had to approach COGAT office in full view of others, which could endanger their safety.

Many Palestinians in life-threatening situations resided in Israel without

legal status. NGOs stated this situation left these persons, who said they could not return to the West Bank due to fear of oppression, vulnerable to human trafficking, violence, and exploitation. Some LGBTQI+ Palestinians were able to obtain a temporary stay permit from COGAT.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

IDPs were present in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, internal displacement in these areas resulted primarily from conflict and violence. On October 13, Israel ordered an estimated 1.2 million persons living in the north of Gaza to evacuate their homes within 24 hours and proceed to southern Gaza.

UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations provided services to IDPs in Gaza and the West Bank, with some limitations due to Israeli restrictions on movement and border access. As the conflict moved from north to south since October 7, UNRWA's ability to provide services to all areas of Gaza severely deteriorated. At year's end, UNRWA in Gaza was leading the humanitarian response to more than 1.9 million IDPs, more than 1.3 million of whom were sheltering in 133 UNRWA installations. Services to IDPs were focused on food assistance, health, and psycho-social support.

UNOCHA reported that 3,326 individuals were displaced in the West Bank and East Jerusalem throughout the year. UNOCHA attributed the

displacement to demolitions by Israeli authorities, military operations, punitive demolitions, and extremist settler violence.

g. Stateless Persons

NGOs estimated tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza lacked identity cards recognized by Israel, and reported they expected the number to be far higher after Israel's military operations beginning October 7, with WHO estimating 5,500 Palestinians born each month "in shelters, in their homes, in the streets amid rubble, or in overwhelmed healthcare facilities," often without stable electricity and internet access to register new births. Some were born in Gaza but were never recognized by Israel as residents, some fled Gaza during the 1967 war, and some left Gaza for various reasons after 1967 but later returned. A small number lacking recognized identity cards were born in Gaza and never left but had only Hamas-issued identity cards, but the Hamas-issued IDs were valid within the boundaries of Gaza only and did not entitle holders to Palestinian residency. The lack of valid ID meant patients suffering serious medical conditions could not access treatment in hospitals in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, or Israel, or travel for medical treatment abroad.

The process for foreign spouses or foreign-born children of Palestinians to obtain permanent legal status in the West Bank was subject to Israeli discretion. Under Israeli policies, in certain situations a foreign spouse could

obtain a spousal permit, but there was no path to status for children, young adults, or other relatives, according to NGOs. Since Israeli authorities had to approve the Palestinian family registry, many Palestinian children and young adults, especially those born abroad, remained without legal status at the end of the year.

Following the October 7 Hamas attack, Israel canceled all permits for Palestinians from Gaza living in the West Bank, for both day laborers and those who had lived and worked there for years. As a result, Palestinians from Gaza living in the West Bank remained at risk of arrest and deportation to Gaza if they encountered any IDF or settler-run checkpoint, essentially trapping them in whatever city in which they were residing.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The PA basic law provided Palestinians the ability to choose their government and vote in periodic free and fair elections held by secret ballot and based on universal, equal suffrage, but the PA had not held national elections in the West Bank or Gaza since 2006. In Gaza, which Hamas controlled since 2007, Hamas authorities did not tolerate public dissent, opposition, civic activism, or the promotion of values contrary to Hamas' political and religious ideology. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza did not have the right to vote in Israeli elections.

Although Israeli law provided citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem could vote only in municipal elections and serve in some municipal offices. They did not have the right to vote in general elections or serve in the Knesset.

Elections and Political Participation

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: The first phase of municipal elections took place in the West Bank in December 2021, followed by a second phase in March 2022. There were no reported abuses or irregularities. There were no national elections in either the West Bank or Gaza since 2006.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The PA permitted a limited range of existing political parties to operate in the West Bank and restricted the ability of Hamas and PIJ members to organize rallies or publicly display flags or posters in support of their organizations.

Hamas placed similar restrictions on Fatah in Gaza, but was more accommodating with Fatah offshoots, including supporters of former Fatah Central Committee members Mohamed Dahlan and Nasser al-Qidwa. According to HRW, the PA and Hamas arbitrarily detained each other's supporters based on political affiliation or expression of views.

There was no legal mechanism by which new Palestinian political parties

could form officially in either Gaza or the West Bank or join the PLO.

Hamas did not allow student or local elections in Gaza, while the PA did allow such elections in the West Bank. Throughout the year, various Gazan civil society groups and Hamas leaders at times called for local elections.

The Central Elections Commission based in Ramallah stated it would support holding local elections in Gaza if the PA prime minister issued a decree setting the date.

PA officials repeatedly claimed they would hold national elections if Israel lived up to its commitments under the Oslo Accords to allow Palestinian voting in East Jerusalem. Surveys reported that Palestinians believed this was mostly an excuse not to hold elections, while they also opposed Israel's voting restrictions on Palestinians residents of East Jerusalem.

Israeli restrictions on Palestinian political parties and participation encompassed various measures, including designating certain parties as "illegal organizations," imposing movement restrictions with checkpoints and barriers affecting political activists, conducting arrests and detentions of party members for perceived security threats, and implementing legal measures against those deemed detrimental to Israeli national security.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable

Groups: No PA laws limited participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and although they did participate in local

elections, they were usually listed much lower on candidate lists, with male candidates prioritized for top jobs. There was only one woman PA governor. Legally, women and minorities could vote and participate in political life, but women faced significant social and cultural barriers in both the West Bank and Gaza. There was a 20 percent quota for women on the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), but the PLC had not met since 2007. There were three women and four Christian members of the 22-member PA cabinet at year's end.

Hamas generally excluded women from leadership positions in Gaza, but there were two women on the organization's 20-member political bureau in Gaza.

Section 4. Corruption in Government

PA law provided criminal penalties for official corruption, but PA authorities did little to prosecute corrupt officials. There were numerous reports of government corruption during the year. Hamas also took little action against corrupt officials within its de facto authority.

Corruption: Allegations of corrupt practices among PA and Hamas officials continued. Within the PA, allegations were primarily related to favoritism and nepotism in public-sector appointments and the lack of democratic mechanisms for change. In Gaza, allegations centered on financial misappropriation. In June, following the release of the Palestinian Coalition

for Accountability and Integrity's (AMAN) annual report on corruption, the PA public prosecutor summoned two prominent anti-corruption activists from AMAN, interrogated them, and then indicted them. The next hearing was scheduled for January 15, 2024. AMAN protested the summons and interrogations, and described them as politically motivated, since their report touched on corrupt business practices involving PA officials and family members close to President Abbas. According to AMAN, prolonged court cases were often used to punish Palestinian civil society and human rights activists and deter others from reporting corruption allegations.

In Gaza, local observers and NGOs alleged instances of Hamas complicity in corrupt practices, including money laundering, predatory loans to civilians in Gaza backed by threats of violence, preferential purchasing terms for real estate, and financial gains from tax and fee collections from Gazan importers. Hamas imposed taxes on imported products, as well as several types of products entering from the West Bank. Hamas pressured private companies to provide its members free utilities and communications services. Hamas used the threat of exit permits to attempt to extort bribes and pressure businesses to pay additional taxes or contribute to Hamas-run or Hamas-affiliated charities or projects.

International organizations cited corruption in Hamas' hiring practices, creating a system of patronage that hampered economic growth. Observers noted that Hamas applied religious and ideological litmus tests in hiring

practices. Local business representatives in Gaza alleged the PA Ministry of Civil Affairs, which submitted applications to Israeli authorities for the entry of restricted materials into Gaza, engaged in nepotism and gave preferential treatment to Gaza-based importers close to the ministry. Observers cited various instances in which individuals used their relationships with the Ministry of Civil Affairs to disadvantage or blacklist competing businesses, including restricting their ability to exit Gaza.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

Palestinian human rights groups and international organizations reported restrictions on their work in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza by the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, and Israeli security forces. Some of these organizations reported the PASF and PA police harassed their employees and pressured individuals and organizations not to work with them. For example, LFJ reported that on March 13, the PA Ministry of Economy suspended their registration based on a recommendation from the Palestinian General Intelligence Service.

Gaza-based NGOs reported that de facto authorities' harassment and restrictions on civil society continued during the year. Hamas

representatives appeared unannounced at their offices to seek tax payments, demand beneficiary lists and salary information, and summoned NGO representatives to police stations for questioning. NGOs raised concerns regarding the shrinking operational space for international NGOs in the West Bank and Gaza, including Israeli travel bans affecting their Gaza-based staff and Israeli scrutiny of NGO operations and employees.

The United Nations and several international NGOs reported the Israeli government denied permits to UN and NGO local Gazan staff to exit Gaza into Israel. The Israeli government stated all Gaza exit requests were reviewed on a case-by-case basis in accordance with security considerations arising from Hamas' de facto control of Gaza.

UNRWA reported staff movement continued to be restricted and unpredictable at several checkpoints, prior to October 7, notably those controlling access to East Jerusalem or through the barrier. UNRWA reported that after October 7, its staff often could not travel from home to work in the West Bank or travel from the West Bank to UN offices in East Jerusalem.

The Israeli government restricted the ability of Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations to investigate and publish their findings on human rights cases, citing national security and terrorism laws. Israeli authorities designated certain Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organizations based on alleged affiliation with terrorist organizations.

NGOs and humanitarian agencies stated the Israeli government delayed the approval of entry visas for their employees entering Israel to support humanitarian activities, including those related to the conflict in Gaza.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: Israeli and Palestinian human rights NGOs operating in the West Bank, Gaza, or both, including B'Tselem, Rabbis for Human Rights, Breaking the Silence, Yesh Din, COMET-ME, and HRW, reported some of their employees were subjected to questioning, interrogations, detentions, intimidation, death threats, or physical assault by security services.

On July 30, an Israeli military court sentenced B'Tselem field researcher Naser Nawaj'ah to six weeks' probation as part of a plea agreement. Nawaj'ah was convicted of interference with a soldier's duties while settlers entered a Palestinian village escorted by security forces. According to B'Tselem, Israeli security forces targeted Nawaj'ah to sabotage his work documenting human rights abuses in the southern West Bank, and repeatedly subjected him to harassment, intimidation, and reprisal.

Issa Amro, a well-known Palestinian activist and the founder of Youth Against Settlements, reported suffering frequent abuse, assaults, and torture by Israeli security forces. On February 13, while being interviewed by journalist Lawrence Wright, Amro was assaulted by an Israeli soldier who was sentenced to 10 days in military jail. On October 7, Amro reported that he was detained, blindfolded, beaten, and tortured by Israeli settlers and

soldiers during a 10-hour period. On October 26, international media reported that Israeli security forces expelled Amro from his home in Hebron, after he hosted Australian journalist Riley Stuart and Yehuda Shaul, the codirector of the Israeli think tank Ofek, and cofounder of Breaking the Silence.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The Israeli government maintained a policy of nonengagement with the UN Human Rights Council's special rapporteur on the situation in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 and the Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel. The government did not cooperate with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and stopped granting visas to its staff after the 2020 publication of a UN Human Rights Council database of companies and "business activities related to settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory." Israel did not grant or renew visas for OHCHR international staff during the year, forcing the agency's 16 resident staff to work remotely from outside Israel without direct access to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The government also did not renew the visa of the UN chief humanitarian aid official and Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Lynn Hastings, citing alleged anti-Israel bias. While Hastings rejected those allegations, she departed the country on December 16 after her visa expired.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The ICHR continued serving as the PA's

ombudsman and human rights commission, issuing monthly and annual reports on human rights abuses within PA-controlled areas and formal recommendations to the PA. The ICHR faced resource shortages that limited its ability to work effectively. Local and international human rights NGOs cooperated with the ICHR. Complaints regarding Israeli security force conduct in the West Bank and Gaza were received by the IDF's Military Advocate General. Local and international human rights NGOs reported that the military advocate general failed to hold perpetrators accountable for abuses against Palestinians, except in extreme cases.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape was illegal under PA law, but the legal definition did not address spousal rape or rape of men by other men. Punishment of rape was five to 15 years in prison. According to local NGOs, neither the PA nor Hamas effectively enforced laws pertaining to rape in the West Bank and Gaza, respectively.

During the October 7 terrorist attack, Hamas militants engaged in widespread rape and GBV including sexual mutilation, according to numerous media reports. Hamas continued to hold many women hostage in Gaza. Media reports cited testimony from released hostages and doctors, who said Hamas raped and sexually abused hostages.

PA law did not explicitly prohibit domestic violence. The PA and Hamas did not enforce the law effectively in domestic violence cases in the West Bank and Gaza, respectively. NGOs reported Palestinian women were frequently unwilling to report cases of violence or abuse to the PA or Hamas due to fear of retribution or little expectation of assistance. Approximately 59 percent of Palestinian women who were or had ever been married (ages 15 to 64) experienced physical violence in the past 12 months, with rates of 52 percent in the West Bank and 70 percent in Gaza. Additionally, 14 percent of unmarried women faced violence from a household member.

Humanitarian actors cautioned of heightened risk of GBV as a result of the conflict, including domestic violence and potential for early and forced marriage in light of increased familial and community tensions exacerbated by displacement, food insecurity, and safety concerns. At the end of the year, there were no operational safe spaces for GBV survivors in Gaza.

PA law criminalized “adultery, breaking the hymen, and breaching the marital bond.” According to a report by UN Women, women faced more severe penalties for adultery than men, and women could only file a complaint for adultery through male relatives. According to the report, most cases of adultery brought to court resulted from husbands trying to blackmail or exploit their wives.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: NGOs criticized insufficient enforcement of laws that disallowed “family honor” as a defense

for perpetrators of so-called honor killings and judges' imposition of lighter sentences for crimes against women and children compared to those committed against men. According to the Palestinian Human Rights and Democracy Media Center, as of August 15, three Palestinian women were killed in so-called honor killings in the West Bank and one in Gaza.

Discrimination: Inheritance for Muslims in the West Bank and Gaza fell under the Palestinian Basic Law, based on sharia law. Women had a right to inheritance but generally received less than men. According to human rights groups, in some cases women were attacked by male family members for asserting their right to an inheritance. Men could marry more than one wife. Women could add conditions to marriage contracts to protect their interests in the event of divorce and child custody disputes but rarely did so. Local officials sometimes advised women in these situations to leave their communities to avoid harassment.

PA law prohibited discrimination based on gender and disabilities, but the PA did not effectively enforce those laws and regulations in the West Bank. Nor did Hamas in Gaza. PA law stated that work was the right of every capable citizen; however, it regulated the work of women, preventing them from employment in dangerous occupations. As a result, most women were not able to work at night or in the mining or energy sectors. Women endured prejudice and, in some cases, repressive conditions at work. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

Hamas enforced a conservative interpretation of Islam in Gaza that discriminated against women. Hamas authorities pressured women to conform to an interpretation of Islamic norms that generally restricted women's movement. There were reports unmarried women faced restrictions on travel out of Gaza even for educational purposes, when male members of their families sought a no-travel order from police.

Additionally, there were reports that women often had to travel in groups when visiting certain public areas such as the beach. There were sporadic reports of security officers requiring a man to prove that an accompanying woman in a public space was his spouse.

According to press and NGO reports, some women students in Gaza reported being forced by school personnel to wear a hijab or other conservative dress. In some instances, teachers in Hamas-run schools in Gaza sent girls home for not wearing conservative attire, although enforcement was not systematic. In Gaza, discrimination against women, including married women, reportedly took place in all sectors, including banks, NGOs, day care centers, and schools, and was practiced by the de facto government as well as private actors. Reports of gender-based employment discrimination against women in Gaza were common, and factories often did not hire pregnant or newly married women to avoid the need to approve maternity leave. According to the UN Population Fund, Hamas police did not have a crime classification for gender-based-violence, and women who arrived in hospital due to a case of domestic violence were

pressured to lie and officially register a fall as the cause of harm.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. Abortion was prohibited in the West Bank by the Jordan Penal Code and in Gaza by the Criminal Code of 1935, except in certain cases to protect the life of the pregnant woman. Women had access to contraception; however, sexual and reproductive services were unevenly available across the occupied territories, especially in remote rural areas of the West Bank and in Gaza, and insufficiently resourced.

There were some discriminatory gender and sociocultural norms associated with women receiving sexual and reproductive health services, particularly for single women and youth. LGBTQI+ individuals reported problems accessing health services due to gender identity that did not confirm to legal identity documents. Although some health facilities reported the availability of a written medical protocol on clinical management of rape, there were many reports of a lack of a uniform approach or standard procedures for cases related to sexual violence. In Gaza, while menstrual hygiene supplies were widely available for private purchase prior to October 7, access to clean water and reliable sanitation facilities was a chronic problem. After October 7, international media outlets reported that many Palestinian women in Gaza took norethisterone tablets to delay menstruation given the severe restrictions on access to water, toilets, and menstrual hygiene

products, and the unsanitary conditions most Palestinians in Gaza lived in through year's end. Local media reported Palestinian women foraging for scraps of cloth they could use as a menstrual product, including cloth torn from tents they lived in. UNRWA provided reproductive health services, including preconception care, prenatal care, intranatal care, postnatal care, and family planning, to UNRWA-registered refugees. Access to these supplies and services diminished or became nonexistent after October 7.

The Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association (PFPPA) reported that by the end of October, women shared the limited quantity of contraceptive pills that remained available. The PFPPA reported that women with intrauterine contraceptive devices experienced bleeding and infections due to the unhygienic conditions in shelters, and that by October 30, there were no options for IUD removal in Gaza, posing long-term risks to women's reproductive health, including severe bleeding.

WHO estimated thousands of women gave birth in unsanitary conditions, often with no clean water or medical assistance. Some women able to access a functioning hospital for their delivery underwent caesarean sections without anesthesia. Media outlets reported that doctors often performed hysterectomies on young women to prevent them "bleeding out," given the lack of access to medical supplies, leaving the young women unable to have more children. These hysterectomies, as well as other reproductive health-related procedures such as caesarean sections, were

routinely performed with little to no anesthetic. Oxfam reported in November that, according to their Gaza-based partner Juzoor for Health and Social Development, premature births had increased by 25-30 percent as a result of increased stress on pregnant women, including fleeing bombing and living in overcrowded shelters in squalid conditions. Juzoor also reported that particularly in northern Gaza, cases of placenta abruption – a serious condition that occurs to pregnant women during childbirth and could be life threatening to both the mother and baby – had more than doubled.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The Palestinian Basic Law included broad protections for Palestinians but was often superseded by informal tribal laws or the Jordanian penal code, which offered less protection. There were no Palestinian laws that specifically provided for the protection of members of racial or ethnic minorities.

The government of Israel assigned the IDF to maintain law and order in the West Bank through a series of military orders, but none specifically provided for the protection of Palestinian civilians or referenced Palestinian rights. Rather, the focus of the IDF's presence in the West Bank was the protection of Israeli citizens residing or transiting there. COGAT coordinated Israeli activities with the Palestinian Authority.

Israeli settlements in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem, had approximately 502,991 residents as of the beginning of the year, according to data from the Israeli Ministry of Interior, marking an increase of more than 2.5 percent since the beginning of 2022. The Israeli settler population in the West Bank excluding East Jerusalem grew almost 3 percent during the year, to 517,407 as of December 31, according to the Israeli Ministry of Interior's population registry, representing an increase of more than 15 percent since 2018. Social services in Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including housing, education, and health care, were available only to Israelis and not Palestinians, according to NGOs.

The United Nations estimated that approximately 27,500 Palestinian Bedouins lived in Area C of the West Bank. Many were UNRWA-registered refugees. Bedouins often resided in areas later designated by Israel as closed military zones or that were planned for settlement expansion. The Israeli government conducted demolitions and forcibly displaced Bedouin and herding communities in Area C. Many of these communities lacked access to water, health care, education, and other basic services. The United Nations also documented an intensifying trend of Israeli extremist settlers displacing Bedouin communities from Area C by force. Extremist settler attacks forced Bedouin residents of the West Bank village of al-Baqa to vacate the village in July. Settlers subsequently demolished the village that same month, according to the United Nations. UN monitors reported that more than 400 Palestinian Bedouins evacuated six villages in Area C

during the year due to the threat of violent settler attacks.

A June report by Israeli NGOs Kerem Navot and Haqel stated nearly half of West Bank land expropriated for public purposes was used exclusively by Jewish settlers. While this land was initially taken for infrastructure such as roads, the report noted, Israel later repurposed it for the establishment of new settlements. The report indicated that only 2 percent of expropriated land was used solely by Palestinians. Most expropriation orders centered on road construction for shared use, but some were for settlers' access paths or internal settlement roads. Expropriation orders extended to archaeological sites as well. An example was the allocation of 139 dunams (approximately 34.34 acres) near the Palestinian village of al-Auja for the Archelais archaeological site.

Settler violence against Palestinians increased dramatically, with UNOCHA documenting a 43 percent increase in the number of settler attacks since 2022. According to UNOCHA, there were 1,277 incidents of settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, including 911 attacks resulting in property damage, 163 incidents resulting in casualties, and 153 incidents resulting in both, the highest annual total of settler incidents since the agency started recording the data in 2006. UNOCHA recorded 15 Palestinian fatalities from settler attacks during the year. Prior to October 7, UNOCHA reported there was an average of 21 incidents per week resulting in Palestinian casualties or property damage, and from October 7 to the year's

end, there was an average of 30 incidents per week.

Human rights groups including Hamoked, B'Tselem, the WBPC, and Breaking the Silence argued that settler violence was designed to depopulate Area C of its Palestinian inhabitants. According to B'Tselem and WBPC, during the year settler violence forcibly depopulated 16 Palestinian communities.

According to UNOCHA and the WBPC, 1,442 Palestinians were displaced by extremist settler violence and access restrictions, 87 percent of them since October 7. In August, 35 Palestinian households (approximately 240 individuals, including 150 children) left Qaboun, a herding community in Area C of the West Bank, and relocated to Area B, according to UNOCHA.

These residents previously evacuated the village of Ras al Tin in 2022.

Separately, five communities including Lifjim, Ein Samiya, Wedadie, al-Baq'a, and Qabounare were depopulated due to repeated attacks by settlers. The Norwegian Refugee Council reported that more than 60 Palestinian communities in the West Bank were at heightened risk of forcible transfer due to extremist settler violence, expansion, discriminatory policies, and unjust planning and zoning practices.

Throughout the year hate crimes and violence were committed against Palestinians and their property, often with the stated purpose of exacting a "price" for actions taken by the Israeli government or Palestinians against the attackers' interests. The most common offenses, according to PA police, were attacks on vehicles, defacement of real estate, harm to Muslim and

Christian holy sites, assault, and damage to agricultural lands. On February 26, following the killing of two Israelis by a Palestinian gunman, approximately 400 extremist settlers descended on and attacked the Palestinian town Huwara, resulting in widespread destruction including the torching of Palestinian-owned cars, businesses, and approximately 30 homes and the death of one Palestinian. The IDF's military commander for the West Bank called the attack a "pogrom," and an inquiry by the IDF found that the military failed to deploy enough soldiers to prevent the riots.

UN monitors noted that extremist settler violence generally went unchecked, with Israeli soldiers often standing idly by during attacks or even participating in aggression against Palestinians and human rights activists. Israeli police routinely closed investigations into settler violence citing a lack of evidence, with only 7 percent of such cases yielding indictments and 3 percent leading to convictions, according to Israeli human rights NGO Yesh Din.

UNOCHA reported that the ISF supported settler attacks by providing security protection and refusing to detain violent settlers. ISF soldiers routinely were filmed guarding and standing idly during major settler attacks in the West Bank, including in Huwara, Turmos Ayya, and Umm Safa. NGOs also reported that when ISF soldiers arrived at the scene of a settler attack, they often favored Israeli settlers. On June 22, when Palestinians from the village of Tuba in the southern West Bank called to request ISF assistance

when facing extremist violent settlers, ISF arrived and immediately arrested a Palestinian shepherd whom settlers had beaten, rather than detaining settlers present at the scene.

In some cases, ISF soldiers both facilitated and participated in violence. During two separate incidents in March, Israeli soldiers were filmed escorting settlers into Huwara as they attacked, and in one video more than a dozen soldiers were filmed dancing with settlers as they attacked cars and set fire to buildings in the town. On May 26, according to press reports, extremist settlers attacked farmers on land east of Ramallah, again under the protection of the ISF. Settlers set fire to five cars and there were reports the ISF prevented Palestinians from reaching their vehicles and homes to put out the flames. An off-duty IDF soldier was also arrested and subsequently indicted for participating in the June 24 settler attack on Umm Safa.

Various human rights groups, including Yesh Din, Rabbis for Human Rights, and B'Tselem, reported that Israeli authorities insufficiently investigated and rarely prosecuted settler violence. Palestinian residents were reportedly reluctant to report incidents because Israeli police stations in the West Bank were located inside Israeli settlements, often where alleged perpetrators resided, and they feared settler retaliation. Palestinians were also discouraged by a lack of accountability in most cases, according to NGOs.

There were numerous reports of settler violence during the olive harvest,

which Palestinian groups claimed were aimed at disrupting the Palestinian olive industry. Israeli NGO Yesh Din reported 99 incidents of settler attacks it asserted were intended to prevent olive harvesting, a 160 percent increase over the previous year.

Israeli COGAT reported there were 342 Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israelis after October 7. On August 21, Palestinian militants shot and killed Batsheva Nigri, an Israeli woman from Beit Hagai, and injured another Israeli settler in a drive-by shooting attack along road 60 south of Hebron city. Her daughter was in the back seat and witnessed her mother's killing.

On November 2, Palestinian militants shot and killed Elhanan Klein, 29, as he was returning from army reserve duty to his home in the settlement of Einav. He was found in his car, which crashed and overturned on the side of Route 557 near the Palestinian town of Bayt Lid.

The Israeli government and settler organizations in Jerusalem made efforts to increase property ownership by Jewish Israelis in Jerusalem. UNOCHA and NGOs such as Bimkom and Ir Amim alleged that the goal of Jerusalem municipal and Israeli national policies was to decrease the number of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, noting the Israeli government's goal of "maintaining a solid Jewish majority in the city," as stated in the Jerusalem municipality's master plan.

In some cases, private Jewish organizations acquired legal ownership of

reclaimed Jewish property in East Jerusalem, including in the Old City, and through protracted judicial action sought to evict Palestinian families living there. According to NGOs, Israeli authorities designated approximately 35 percent of East Jerusalem for Israeli neighborhoods and settlements and another 35 percent as green space and national parks. A significant portion of this land previously was private Palestinian-owned land. Palestinians were able in some cases to rent or purchase Israeli-owned property, including private property on Israeli government-owned land, but faced significant legal and governmental barriers to both. Israeli NGOs stated that after accounting for Israeli neighborhoods/settlements, Israeli government property, and declared national parks, only an estimated 15 percent of all land in East Jerusalem remained for residential development and construction by Palestinians.

Although Israeli law provided that all residents of Jerusalem were fully and equally eligible for public services provided by the municipality and other Israeli authorities, the Jerusalem municipality and other authorities failed to provide sufficient social services, education, and infrastructure to Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem.

On May 18, as part of Jerusalem Day celebrations, a Flags March took place in Jerusalem in which approximately 50,000 Israeli marchers entered the Old City of Jerusalem through the Damascus Gate, the main entry to the Muslim Quarter, according to press reports. Crowds danced and chanted “the

nation of Israel lives, may your villages burn,” and “death to Arabs,” according to reports, while some individuals spat at Palestinians and reporters, beat on shop doors in the Palestinian neighborhoods, and spray-painted and affixed anti-Palestinian slogans to Palestinian property. Israeli police blocked surrounding streets and forcibly removed Palestinian protesters from the route, according to international observers and media reporters.

Children

Birth Registration: The PA registered Palestinians born in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Israel required the PA to transmit this information to Israel’s Civil Administration. Israel did not allow the PA to determine citizenship. Children of Palestinian parents could receive a Palestinian identity card issued by the Civil Administration if they were born in the West Bank or Gaza to a parent who held a Palestinian identity card. The PA Ministry of Interior and Israel’s Civil Administration both played a role in determining a person’s eligibility for that card.

The Israeli government registered the births of Palestinians born in Jerusalem, although some Palestinians who had experienced the process reported that administrative delays could last for years. According to estimates from the Society of St. Yves Catholic Center for Human Rights, there were more than 10,000 undocumented children in East Jerusalem.

Education: In the West Bank, UNRWA, the PA, religious institutions, and private foundations all provided instruction. In Gaza, Hamas also provided instruction. On November 6, the Palestinian Ministry of Education suspended the 2023-2024 school year for the 625,000 schoolchildren in the Gaza Strip due to the escalation of conflict.

According to NGOs, the difficulty of obtaining permits to build schools and the destruction of schools built without permits deprived many West Bank Palestinian children of an education. Israeli restrictions on construction in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem also limited Palestinian students' access to education. According to UNICEF, three Palestinian schools were demolished in the West Bank during the year, displacing 78 students from their schools. As of the end of the year, there were 58 outstanding demolition orders against schools where at least 6,400 children were taught in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, according to UNOCHA.

UNOCHA recorded 115 education-related abuses from January to July in the West Bank, including the ISF firing tear gas, stun grenades, or rubber-coated bullets, ISF and settler intimidation at schools, and detentions and movement restrictions preventing students from reaching their classes. These actions affected approximately 8,000 students, increasing their risk of dropping out, according to UNOCHA.

There were reportedly insufficient classrooms to accommodate

schoolchildren in Jerusalem. In some East Jerusalem schools, students studied in unsafe buildings in order to continue using Palestinian Authority-issued textbooks rather than moving to modern school buildings constructed by the Jerusalem Municipality and using the Israeli curriculum. Based on population data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the NGO Ir Amim issued a report ahead of the 2022-2023 school year showing a shortage of 3,517 classrooms for Palestinian children who were residents in East Jerusalem. Ir Amim also reported that following a freedom of information request, the Jerusalem Municipality stated it did not know where 40,963 Palestinian children in Jerusalem were enrolled in school. According to Ir Amim, this figure constituted 29 percent of East Jerusalem children of compulsory school age.

Child Abuse: PA law prohibited incest, failing to care for a child, and violence against children; however, PA authorities in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza rarely prosecuted and punished perpetrators of family violence. According to Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics data published in September, in 2021, prosecutors brought one case of incest and charged 15 cases of failing to care for a child.

According to a UNICEF September report, domestic violence was widespread in the West Bank and Gaza. UNICEF estimated that approximately two-thirds of children through age 11 encountered physical violence (64.8 percent), and more than three-quarters experienced psychological violence

(76.7 percent). These figures were slightly higher for boys, children with disabilities, and registered child refugees. Notably, psychological violence was more prevalent than physical violence. There were reports Hamas and PIJ ran militaristic summer camps in Gaza that were attended by thousands of children and included religious courses and military-style training (see section 1.i. for more information on child victims of conflict-related abuses in Gaza).

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age for marriage in the West Bank was 18 for both men and women, unless a judge agreed marriage at an earlier age was in “the best interest of both parties.” Child marriage was reportedly less widespread in the West Bank than in Gaza. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics published data in April showing that, as of 2020, 4.3 percent of girls younger than 18 in the West Bank were married, compared with 19.3 percent in Gaza.

In Gaza, a judge could authorize the marriage of children below the minimum age if they had reached puberty and the girl’s guardian, typically the father or grandfather, consented. Although a pre-1967 Egyptian law set the absolute minimum marriage age at nine for girls and 12 for boys, local Palestinian law raised it to 15 for girls and 16 for boys. In the West Bank, aiding a girl younger than 15 to marry was a criminal offense.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: In the West Bank, the PA considered statutory rape a felony, based on Jordanian law. Punishment of rape of

someone younger than 15 included a minimum sentence of seven years' imprisonment. In Gaza under Hamas, suspects convicted of rape of a child younger than 14 were eligible for the death penalty. There were reports that societal norms in Gaza led to underreporting of sexual exploitation of children. The minimum age of consensual sex in the West Bank was 16. Gaza had no legal age of consent because marriage was legally required before sexual intercourse was allowed.

PA law did not have comprehensive legislation addressing the sexual exploitation of children. Some provisions of the Jordanian penal code applied, including a prohibition on using duress, threat, or deceit to procure a person for prostitution, with punishment of one to three years' imprisonment. Holding a woman against her will in a brothel or other place to have sex with a man was punishable by two months to two years' imprisonment. The law also criminalized abduction, for which punishment was enhanced if the abductee was a child or if the abductor also committed rape or sexual assault.

Antisemitism

Some Palestinians and Muslim religious leaders used antisemitic rhetoric, including Holocaust denial. PA President Mahmoud Abbas referenced antisemitic tropes and distorted the Holocaust in an August speech to Fatah party members, claiming Hitler "fought [Jews] because of their social role

and not their religion.” Abbas’ remarks were condemned by various governments; Israeli, Palestinian and international NGOs; and a group of 96 Palestinian intellectuals. A Hamas official in an April sermon prayed for “annihilation” and “paralysis” of Jews and prayed for the ability to “get to the necks of the Jews.” Antisemitism, including expressions of longing for a world without Israel and glorification of terror attacks on Israelis and Jews, regularly featured in public discourse, was broadcast on official media, and was present in some academic settings. On July 7, Palestine TV broadcast remarks by Presidential Advisor on Religious Affairs Mahmoud Habbash during which he said, “a group from among the people of the Book [i.e. Jews] wants to deceive you....and turn you back from your religion...and they are fighting us until they turn us back from our religion.”

Israeli civil society organizations and media outlets stated there was problematic content in PA textbooks, including those used by UNRWA in its schools, such as antisemitic content, incitement to violence directed against Israel, and the failure to include Judaism alongside Christianity and Islam when discussing religion. Israeli authorities continued to delete certain information on Palestinian history and culture from the PA curriculum in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Authorities sought to tie funding for schools to the use of the Israeli curriculum and took actions against noncompliant schools.

UNRWA reported that it had “zero tolerance for hatred, incitement to

violence or discrimination” in school textbooks and that it reviewed the content of educational materials to ensure they were in line with UN values and principles and to address problematic content. UNRWA reported that it addresses concerns with the PA curriculum with a teacher-centered approach emphasizing critical thinking skills. UNRWA also investigated allegations of staff misconduct and imposed disciplinary measures when warranted.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: In the West Bank, neither PA nor Jordanian law criminalized consensual same-sex sexual activity. The PA’s office of Islamic rulings, however, stated same-sex sexual activity was a crime subject to harsh punishment. There were no reports of punishments for same-sex sexual activity during the year.

In Gaza, sexual acts “against the order of nature” and same-sex sexual activity were illegal under legacy provisions of the British Mandate Criminal

Code. The offense carried a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment. There were no reports of punishment for same-sex sexual activity during the year.

Violence and Harassment: There were reported cases of violence, harassment, or abuse based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the West Bank. The OHCHR and NGOs reported that Hamas security forces in Gaza harassed and detained persons due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Both noted, however, that such cases were rarely reported, especially in Gaza, because of concerns about protecting the safety of those targeted.

On May 8, media reported Palestinian Zuhair al-Ghaleeth was shot by masked gunmen and buried in an unmarked grave. An independent armed group, the Lions' Den, claimed responsibility and released a video where al-Ghaleeth confessed to being blackmailed by Israeli agents for intelligence gathering. In a four-minute video clip posted on social media, al-Ghaleeth stated that Israeli agents had used a video of him engaging in a sexual act with another man to blackmail him.

LFJ reported PA security officers in the West Bank harassed and sometimes arrested individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBTQI+ individuals were also subjected to targeted hate crimes and violent acts. According to LFJ, the PASF apprehended four LGBTQI+ activists on December 11, 2022, and held them in administrative detention for nine days

prior to interrogation. On December 20, 2022, the public prosecutor formally charged the four with: engaging in an indecent act; transmitting “immodest words using an electronic network”; and using an electronic network to disseminate or publish obscene materials. Two court hearings were held but after several postponements the case remained open at the end of the year.

Media reported that LGBTQI+ persons in the West Bank and Gaza concealed their sexual orientation due to fear their families would kill them. Observers reported that societal norms and familial expectations created an environment of increased risk and discrimination for those who expressed their sexual identity openly.

Discrimination: The PA did not provide protection for or prohibit discrimination against the LGBTQI+ community. Hamas authorities were openly hostile to the LGBTQI+ community in Gaza. Homosexuality was widely considered to be taboo in areas under PA control and in Gaza.

Activities associated with the LGBTQI+ community met with strong societal opposition, and the Palestinian police often acted to prevent these activities. The LGBTQI+ community in the West Bank operated underground and had no vocal representatives or NGOs willing to speak in the West Bank, according to observers. In Gaza, according to observers, there was no visible LGBTQI+ community. Observers reported that human rights organizations in Gaza did not openly monitor or address LGBTQI+ matters.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: There was no legal method for altering gender markers on identity documents in either the West Bank or Gaza.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: According to media reports, family members of LGBTQI+ individuals often subjected them to involuntary or coercive medical, psychological, and religious practices throughout the West Bank and Gaza.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: The PA in some cases limited freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, but not explicitly based on sexual orientation or identity. According to press reports the PA did tolerate such actions by vigilantes and armed militias, but there were few such incidents during the year.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities received inconsistent and poor-quality services and care in the occupied territories. The PA in the West Bank partially depended on UN agencies and NGOs to care for persons with physical disabilities.

Persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, or transportation on an equal basis with others. The PA government did not provide information or communication in accessible formats. PA law prohibited discrimination based on a permanent or partial physical, psychological, or mental disability, but it did not mandate access to

buildings, information, or communications. According to disability rights advocates, in the West Bank and Gaza, persons with disabilities faced discrimination in hiring and access to the workplace.

The ICHR reported a lack of accessible transportation in Palestinian areas across the West Bank. UNRWA implemented physical accessibility standards in the design, construction, and upgrading of UNRWA installations, and in 2022 reported that 30 percent of UNRWA installations were fully accessible to persons with disabilities when at their normal capacity. Nevertheless, after Israeli security forces issued evacuation orders for the majority of Gaza's population to relocate, overcrowding of UNRWA shelters impeded access for many persons with disabilities. On November 15, UNRWA reported that on average, 150 persons, including those with disabilities, sheltering in UNRWA schools shared a single toilet.

Palestinians in Gaza reported little to no infrastructure accommodations for persons with mobility disabilities, as well as difficulty in importing wheelchairs and other mobility aids. Hamas offered substandard care for persons with disabilities. Hamas was more likely to provide prostheses and mobility aids to individuals injured in Israeli airstrikes or in protests at the Gaza fence than to those born with disabilities, according to NGOs. HRW stated that the Israeli closure of Gaza, along with neglect from Hamas, made it significantly more difficult for persons with disabilities in Gaza to access wheelchairs, prostheses, crutches, and hearing aids before October 7. After

October 7, many persons with disabilities and their caretakers were unable to follow IDF evacuation orders in Gaza, which subjected them to increased levels of injuries and death from military operations. These groups were particularly impacted as evacuees from northern Gaza were required to move on foot in many cases. NGOs focused on providing services and equipment to persons of disabilities stated that the IDF-imposed closure on Gaza following the October 7 attack forced them to suspend or close operations. HRW reported that Palestinians with disabilities were often unable to flee high-rise apartment buildings under Israeli bombardment due to electricity disruptions that stopped elevators from functioning.

Telecommunications disruptions also prevented persons with disabilities from accessing information to help them decide where, when, and how to flee for greater safety. Media outlets reported that Palestinians evacuated persons with disabilities, as well as sick and injured Palestinians, on hospital beds behind cars, pushing wheelchairs through mud, or simply carrying them in their arms as they fled from the North to the South of Gaza. The United Nations estimated that, at year's end, more than 15 percent of the 1.4 million internally displaced persons in Gaza had a disability, yet more shelters were not equipped to meet their needs.

Haaretz reported that in December the IDF and the Israel Prison Authority arrested and imprisoned a Palestinian woman, age 82, from Gaza who suffered from Alzheimer's disease and her full-time caregiver. According to

press reports, Fahamiya Khalidi was sheltering in a school in Gaza City's Zeitoun neighborhood after leaving her home to escape from Israeli bombardments. Khalidi was jailed under Israel's Incarceration of Unlawful Combatants Law, and Israeli authorities denied a request from a lawyer from Physicians for Human Rights to meet with her. Khalidi was still detained by the end of the year, and her caregiver's whereabouts were unknown.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

On April 5, Israeli police entered the al-Aqsa mosque compound to disperse thousands of worshippers who had gathered in the courtyard for Ramadan prayers, after arresting hundreds of worshippers a day earlier. Media outlets reported that footage shared on social media showed Israeli officers striking individuals with batons, and eyewitnesses reported that Israeli police smashed doors and windows to enter the mosque and deployed stun grenades and metal-tipped rubber bullets once inside. Israeli police stated its forces entered al-Aqsa after "hundreds of rioters and mosque desecrators barricaded themselves" inside. Press reports indicated dozens of Palestinians and two Israeli police were wounded in the clashes in and around the mosque.

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* for more information on tensions at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount

compound at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

PA law provided for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively without any pressure or influence, and conduct legal strikes. The law did not include protections for employees and unions to engage effectively in collective bargaining. The PA did not enforce collective bargaining rights for unions except for those representing PA public sector employees. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and employer or government interference in union functions, but it did not specifically prohibit termination for union activity or provide for job reinstatement for termination due to union activity.

The PA labor code regulated the relationship between the workers in the private sector and their employers while the civil servant law regulated the relationship between the public sector employees and the PA. The requirements for legal strikes were cumbersome, and strikers had little protection from retribution. Prospective strikers had to provide written notice two weeks in advance of a strike (four weeks in the case of public utilities). The PA Ministry of Labor could impose arbitration, and workers or

their trade unions faced disciplinary action if they rejected the result. If the ministry was unable to resolve a dispute, it could refer the dispute to a committee chaired by a delegate from the ministry and composed of an equal number of members designated by the workers and the employer. The law prescribed that unresolved disputes should then move to a specialized labor court, but authorities had not yet established that court as of the end of the year.

The PA enforced prohibitions on antiunion discrimination and employer interference in union functions, but it inconsistently enforced laws regarding freedom of association.

Hamas exercised de facto control over worker rights in Gaza, meaning the PA was unable to enforce labor laws there. Hamas suppressed labor union activities, including placing restrictions on celebrating Labor Day and banning public gatherings of labor unions.

Neither the PA nor the Israeli government effectively enforced labor laws, and penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous crimes. Penalties were rarely applied against violators. Labor unions could not operate independently of authorities and political parties in the West Bank or Gaza. Two main labor unions in the West Bank, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions and the Federation of Independent and Democratic Trade Unions and Workers, competed for membership and political recognition. The politicization of labor unions in Gaza by Hamas

reduced participation and effectiveness in advocating for labor rights.

Kav LaOved, an Israeli workers' rights NGO, reported that employers in settlements employed workers through Palestinian contractors, who commonly limited their rights, including denying pay raises.

Israeli authorities restricted Palestinian laborers from working in Israel following October 7, leading to the immediate unemployment of approximately 13 percent of all employed Palestinians.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <http://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: PA legislation came into effect during the year raising the minimum wage in the West Bank and Gaza by approximately 30 percent

to 1,880 shekels (\$508) per month, although some observers questioned authorities' ability to enforce this policy, especially in Gaza and Area C of the West Bank, which was fully controlled by Israel. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, during the third quarter, 37 percent of those who worked in the private sector received less the minimum wage (12 percent in the West Bank and 93 percent in Gaza). Even after the increase, the minimum wage remained below the poverty line.

PA law prescribed a maximum 48-hour workweek. The law allowed for paid official and religious holidays, which employers could not deduct from annual leave. Workers could not work more than 12 hours of overtime per week.

Occupational Safety and Health: According to Palestinian NGOs, occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were not sufficient for the main industries in PA-controlled territory in the West Bank, or in Hamas-controlled Gaza. The main industries included construction, mining, quarrying, manufacturing, and agriculture. The PA Ministry of Labor was responsible for setting appropriate OSH standards in the West Bank, and Hamas, de facto authority in Gaza, was responsible for doing so there. Responsibility for identifying unsafe work conditions lay with inspectors and not the worker. Palestinian workers did not have the legal protection to remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. Workers generally did not utilize

mechanisms for lodging complaints due to fear of retribution, according to NGOs.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The PA government did not effectively enforce the law on wages, hours of work, or OSH standards. Penalties for violations were sometimes enforced.

The PA government procedures were subject to lengthy delays and appeals, and the number of inspectors was not sufficient to enforce compliance. Labor inspectors could conduct unannounced visits and initiate legal action but did not have the authority to levy fines and penalties against violators. The PA did not effectively monitor smaller worksites, which were at times below legal safety standards. The PA Ministry of Labor did not have authority to enforce Palestinian labor law west of Israel's barrier or in Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Israeli authorities did not enforce labor laws in Israeli settlements. Palestinians working in Israeli settlements reported they received wages lower than the Israeli minimum wage, despite a Supreme Court ruling that Israeli labor laws applied to them. Reportedly, thousands of Palestinians, working mainly in Israel but also partly in Israeli settlements, were detained by IDF authorities after October 7. Approximately 3,000 of these workers were released on November 3 and deported to Gaza (for more information on reports of abuses of Palestinian workers from Gaza, see section 1.i.).

After October 7, the government blocked the vast majority of Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza from entering Israel, according to the Israeli NGO Kav LaOved. Reportedly, some Palestinian workers previously working in Israel and in Israeli settlements did not receive wages after October 7. Israeli authorities did not conduct labor inspections in Israeli settlements, where Palestinian workers constituted a significant part of the workforce. The lack of a competent labor authority in the settlements increased workers' vulnerability to exploitation. NGOs such as Kav LaOved stated that exploitative practices in Israeli settlements were widespread. The International Labor Organization estimated that half of all documented workers with permits paid exorbitant monthly fees to brokers for their work permits.

According to an August 8 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics labor force survey, approximately 164,000 Palestinians worked in Israel and Israeli settlements as of June 30, mostly in construction, manufacturing, and agriculture. These workers were more vulnerable to exploitation and were not eligible for benefits such as paid annual and sick leave. Kav LaOved brought cases to Israeli labor courts on behalf of Palestinian workers employed by enterprises in West Bank settlements. Many of the cases related to nonpayment or misreporting of wages, inadequate medical care following workplace injury, and the settlement of subsequent health insurance claims within the Israeli system.

The size of the informal sector was unknown, but trade unions reported that employers exploited Palestinian workers in the informal sector, and workers hesitated to raise labor violations for fear of losing work permits or deportation. The Federation of Palestine Trade Unions reported that 75,000-85,000 workers per month worked inside Green Line Israel without official work permits, using wall permits, job search, and visitation type permits; and at least 40,000 worked inside Israel without permits or any legal papers. Neither the PA nor the Israeli government enforced labor laws in the informal sector.