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Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2015 - Israel and The Occupied Territories - The Occupied Territories

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Palestinian Authority (PA), according to PA basic law, has an elected president and legislative council. The PA exercised varying degrees of authority in restricted areas of the West Bank due to the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) continuing presence, and none over Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem due to Israel's extension of Israeli law and authority to East Jerusalem in 1967 and an Israeli prohibition on any PA activity anywhere in Jerusalem. The PA only maintains civil and security control in Area A of the West Bank. The PA has only civil control of Area B and joint security control with Israel. The PA has no authority over Israeli residents of the West Bank, Palestinian residents in Area C of the West Bank (over which Israel has security and civil control), or over Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. Although PA laws apply in the Gaza Strip, the PA had little authority in the Gaza Strip, where Hamas exercises de facto control. The PA head of government is Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah. President Mahmoud Abbas, in office since elected to a four-year term in 2005, is also chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and general commander of Fatah. In the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections, candidates backed by Hamas won 74 of 132 seats in elections that generally met democratic standards; however, the PLC has not functioned since 2007. In 2007 Hamas staged a violent takeover of PA government installations in the Gaza Strip and has since maintained a de facto government in the territory. Both PA and Israeli civilian authorities maintained effective control over their security forces. Hamas maintained control of security forces in the Gaza Strip.

The most significant human rights abuses were restrictions on civil liberties, particularly by Hamas in Gaza; excessive use of force by Israeli Security Forces (ISF) in a number of their interactions with Palestinian civilians, and arbitrary arrest and associated torture and abuse, often with impunity by multiple actors in the region. Residents of the occupied territories had limited ability to hold governing authorities accountable for such abuses.

Human rights problems in the parts of the West Bank under PA control included abuse and mistreatment of detainees, poor and overcrowded detention facilities, prolonged detention, and infringements on privacy rights. Restrictions on freedom of speech, press, and assembly continued. There were limits on freedom of association and movement. Corruption, violence against women, and societal discrimination were serious problems. At times, the PA failed to condemn incidents of anti-Semitic expression and embraced as "martyrs" individuals who died while carrying out attacks on Israeli civilians. Abuse of children and discrimination against persons with disabilities also were serious problems. Discrimination based on sexual orientation and HIV/AIDS status persisted. There were some limits on worker rights, and there was forced labor. Child labor, including forced labor, remained a serious problem.

Human rights abuses under Hamas included security forces killing, torturing, arbitrarily detaining, and harassing opponents, including Fatah members, and other Palestinians with impunity. Terrorist organizations and militant factions in the Gaza Strip launched rocket and mortar attacks against civilian targets in Israel, and they did so at or near civilian locations in Gaza. Gaza-based civil rights organizations reported authorities held prisoners in poor conditions in detention facilities in the Gaza Strip, and Hamas publicly executed a number of persons without trial. Hamas also infringed on privacy rights. Hamas restricted the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, religion, and movement of Gaza Strip residents. Discrimination against women and domestic violence were serious problems. Abuse of children and discrimination against persons with disabilities were problems. Hamas frequently promoted anti-Semitism. Discrimination based on sexual orientation and HIV/AIDS status persisted. Restrictions on worker rights continued. Forced labor, including by children, occurred.

Israeli forces killed 149 Palestinians, 77 of whom were attempting to attack Israelis. In a number of these incidents, there were reports of human rights abuses related to actions by Israeli authorities. In addition there were reports of abuse of Palestinian detainees, including children, particularly during arrest and interrogation; austere and overcrowded detention facilities; improper security detention procedures; demolition and confiscation of Palestinian property; limitations on freedom of expression, assembly, and association; and severe restrictions on Palestinians' internal and external freedom of movement. Violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians continued to be a problem, as did only limited punishment of these acts by Israeli authorities. The IDF and the Egyptian government maintained severe restrictions on movement into and out of the Gaza Strip and largely limited the travel of Palestinians out of Gaza to humanitarian cases and some business travelers.

The PA and Israeli authorities took steps to address impunity or reduce abuses, but there were criticisms they did not adequately pursue investigations and disciplinary actions related to violations. Impunity was a major problem under Hamas.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that PA security services committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

Palestinian terrorist groups and unaffiliated individuals committed unlawful killings of Israeli civilians and security forces in both Israel and the West Bank. On April 25, a Palestinian stabbed and seriously injured an Israeli border guard in Hebron. Israeli border guards shot and killed the perpetrator.

On June 19, Palestinians shot and killed an Israeli settler and injured another near the West Bank settlement of Dolev. The ISF apprehended the alleged killer, a 30-year-old resident of the Qalandiya Refugee Camp, with four other suspects on July 15.

During a wave of violence that began in early October and continued through year's end, there were many attacks in the West bank by Palestinians against Israeli civilians and security force personnel. On October 1, Hamas militants shot and killed two Israeli civilians, who were driving in their car near the West Bank settlement of Itamar. The ISF subsequently arrested five Palestinians from Nablus affiliated with Hamas in connection with the attack. On November 4, a Palestinian drove his car into and killed an Israeli border police officer and injured at least two other border police officers near Halhoul junction in the Hebron area. The ISF shot and killed the attacker. On November 13, an assailant shot and killed two Israelis and injured at least five others, including children, while the victims were driving near the West Bank settlement of Otniel in the Hebron area. The ISF took a suspect into custody.

There were also attacks on civilians and security force members in Jerusalem throughout the year. On January 8, an unknown assailant stabbed and injured an Israeli man near the Old City's Damascus Gate. On June 21, a Palestinian stabbed and seriously wounded one Israeli border guard and slightly injured another outside the Damascus Gate. Police shot and injured the attacker and placed him in administrative detention. There were multiple attacks by Palestinians on Israelis in October. For example, on October 3, a Palestinian stabbed and killed two Israelis and injured two others, including a two-year-old boy, in Jerusalem's Old City. Israeli National Police shot and killed the attacker.

There were numerous acts of violence including killings involving Israeli settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank (see section 6). For example, on July 31, Israeli settlers threw Molotov cocktails into a home in Douma village, killing an 18-month-old infant and his parents. Another child remained in critical care at year's end. The government arrested suspects in connection with this attack.

During the week of September 8, there were four settler attacks on Palestinians that led to injury or damage to property, including assault on a seven-year-old boy standing on Huwwara main road (Nablus); injury of six Palestinians in Nablus Governorate caused by stones thrown at their vehicles near Duma and Deir Sharaf; and an arson attack on Palestinian-owned agricultural land near Burin (Nablus).

According to local media, Hamas unlawfully executed at least one person in the Gaza Strip for allegedly collaborating with Israel. By law the PA president must ratify each death penalty sentence, but Hamas did not contact the PA regarding this execution due to Hamas' de facto control over the Gaza Strip and disregard for most PA officials. In April, Amnesty International (AI) released a report entitled "*Strangling Necks: Abduction, Torture and Summary Killings of Palestinians by Hamas Forces during the 2014 Gaza/Israel Conflict*" that alleged that Hamas subjected at least 23 persons to summary extrajudicial executions during the summer 2014 conflict in Gaza.

During the year Israeli forces killed 149 Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem. In some instances there were reports of possible ISF use of excessive force against Palestinian civilians, mostly in the context of the ISF and violent demonstrators coming into contact, and the ISF using live fire and rubber-coated steel bullets. According to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Defense for Children International-Palestine (DCI-Palestine), some of those killed in the West Bank and Jerusalem were minors.

From January 1 through October 1, the ISF killed 22 Palestinian civilians during clashes. On July 3, a senior Israeli military officer shot and killed a 17-year-old Palestinian boy near Qalandiya checkpoint (Jerusalem). According to media reports, the Israeli military claimed that the officer shot the boy while the boy threw rocks at the officer's vehicle. Palestinian sources, however, claimed that security officials shot the boy when he attempted to climb the separation barrier to reach Jerusalem. On July 23, Israeli soldiers shot and killed Falah Abu Maria in the West Bank Governorate of Ramallah during an arrest raid on his home when he was not the target of the raid.

During the wave of violence from October 1 through year's end, the ISF killed an additional 127 Palestinian civilians, including 77 who were reportedly carrying out or attempting attacks against Israeli civilians or security forces during an uptick in violence between Palestinians and the ISF.

NGOs published multiple reports alleging that Israeli security forces committed unlawful killings. On October 27, AI released a report alleging that Israeli forces carried out a series of unlawful killings of Palestinians using intentional lethal force without justification. AI reported that it had documented at least four incidents in which Israeli forces deliberately shot and killed Palestinians when they posed no imminent threat to life. For example, in one incident in September, the ISF shot and fatally wounded 18-year-old Hadeel al-Hashlamoun after they stopped her at a checkpoint in the Old City in Hebron. According to AI, pictures of the standoff that led to her death and accounts by eyewitnesses that AI interviewed showed that she at no time posed a sufficient threat to the soldiers to justify their use of deliberate lethal force. In November, the ISF shot and killed 28-year-old Abdullah Shalaldah at al-Ahli Hospital in Hebron after they entered the hospital room of his cousin, Azzam Shalaldah, whom security forces intended to arrest on suspicion of stabbing an Israeli on October 15. While the IDF released a statement that Abdullah Shalaldah tried to attack them, witnesses reported to AI that he was unarmed, was standing some distance away, and had not attempted to attack them.

On November 25, the local NGO B'Tselem published the text of a letter it sent to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu demanding a cessation of the use of lethal force against people who either harmed, tried to harm, or were suspected of trying to harm others, once they no longer posed any danger.

In March 2014 Israeli soldiers shot and killed Raed Alaa a-Din Nafea Zeiter, a Palestinian and Jordanian citizen and judge, at the Israeli-controlled Allenby Bridge crossing to Jordan after he argued with a soldier and shoved him. Eyewitness accounts differed regarding the circumstances surrounding the incident. Authorities announced an investigation but reported no progress by year's end.

There were numerous reports of the ISF killing Palestinians during riots, demonstrations, at checkpoints, and during

routine operations; in some cases they did not pose a threat to life. In June B'Tselem accused the IDF of excessive use of live fire as a crowd-control measure during Palestinian demonstrations in the West Bank.

In December 2014 Ziyad Abu Ein, a former PA deputy minister, died of a heart attack after reportedly being beaten by Israeli security forces and inhaling tear gas at a demonstration. On January 6, an internal IDF investigation cleared Israeli security officers of any wrongdoing in Abu Ein's death.

In March, the ISF shot and injured 11-year-old Muhammad Hamad in the stomach during a weekly protest march in the West Bank village of Silwad.

In July, the ISF shot and killed 17-year-old Muhammad Sami Ali Kusbah in al-Ram. ISF Binyamin Brigade commander shot him multiple times as he fled, after the boy threw a large rock at the windshield of the brigade commander's military vehicle.

The Military Advocate General (MAG) and Fact-Finding Mechanism headed by Major General Noam Tibon continued to investigate incidents that occurred during hostilities between Israel and Hamas and other armed groups in Gaza in 2014. As of June 11, of 224 cases, the MAG opened 15 criminal cases against Israeli personnel, including one against a senior commander. The MAG stated it continued to receive and consider complaints dating to the hostilities of July and August 2014, with each complaint receiving an initial examination to determine its credibility and nature.

NGOs continued to accuse Israel of using disproportionate force and indiscriminate fire to counter the threat posed by rockets launched from the Gaza Strip, resulting in unnecessary and excessive civilian casualties.

In January B'Tselem released a report entitled *Black Flag: The Legal and Moral Implications of the Policy of Attacking Residential Buildings in the Gaza Strip, Summer 2014* and concluded that the IDF took a broad definition of what constitutes a "military objective," targeting buildings without specific information about the effective contribution they made to military action and the clear advantage gained by destroying them; that IDF violated the "principle of proportionality"; and that, despite touting of its process of warning residents with phone calls, leaflets, and "knocks on the roof" that they were in imminent danger, these warnings were ineffective in many instances.

Also in January Physicians for Human Rights released a report entitled *No Safe Place* on the impact of hostilities in Gaza in 2014 on the medical infrastructure there. The report asserted that attacks were characterized by heavy and unpredictable bombardments of civilian neighborhoods in a manner that failed to discriminate between legitimate targets and protected populations and caused widespread destruction of homes and civilian property. The report concluded the attacks were unlikely to have been the result of decisions made by individual soldiers or commanders. The report alleged that Israeli warning mechanisms were inadequate and that Israeli forces failed to take the requisite precautions that would effectively enable the safe evacuation of the civilian population, including provision of safe spaces and routes. The report also concluded that authorities often denied coordination of medical evacuation and that there were many reported attacks on medical teams and facilities.

In April DCI-Palestine reported that it had verified the deaths of 547 Palestinian children among those killed in Gaza, 535 of them as a direct result of Israeli attacks during the conflict in Gaza. DCI-Palestine reported that nearly 68 percent of the children killed by Israeli forces were 12 years old or younger. DCI-Palestine alleged that it had found overwhelming and repeated evidence that Israeli forces committed grave violations against children amounting to war crimes. This action included direct targeting of children by Israeli drone-fired missiles and attacks on schools.

The Israeli government periodically launched strikes into the Gaza Strip against specific targets and in response to militant groups' rockets fired into Israel. IDF ground forces, tanks, ships, aircraft, and remote-controlled weapons fired on Palestinians inside the Gaza Strip. According to B'Tselem these attacks killed Palestinians participating in hostilities, Palestinians not participating in hostilities, and some Palestinians who were the objects of targeted killing.

There were also multiple reports of Israeli forces killing Palestinians in restricted areas in the Gaza Strip. For example, on October 10, Israeli security forces fired on Palestinian demonstrators approaching the border fence killing seven and injuring 60 others. Israel repeatedly warned Palestinians they were at risk of being shot if they entered a "buffer zone" which extends 328 yards into Gaza territory from the border fence. Israeli forces, however, reportedly regularly enforced the "buffer zone" by firing toward Palestinians approaching at distances further from the fence. According to Palestinian human rights organizations, attacks on civilians took place up to 1,640 yards inside the border fence. If the "buffer zone" extended this far, it would constitute approximately 17 percent of the total territory of the Gaza Strip.

b. Disappearance

In the West Bank, there were no reports of politically motivated disappearances. In the Gaza Strip, Hamas security operatives carried out extrajudicial detentions based on political affiliation. Information concerning the whereabouts and welfare of those detained was not consistently or reliably available, and Hamas denied many of those detained due process or access to family and legal counsel. There were reports of disappearances of Israeli citizens who crossed into Gaza and reportedly were apprehended by Hamas.

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

The PA basic law prohibits torture or use of force against detainees; however, international human rights groups reported that torture and abuse remained a problem. Despite the commitment by President Abbas to investigate reports of torture in the 2012 Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) report, the PA Ministry of Interior took no action during the year.

Palestinian detainees held by PA security forces registered complaints of abuse and torture with the ICHR. Reported abuses by PA authorities in the West Bank included forcing prisoners, including persons accused of affiliation with Hamas, to sit in a painful position for long periods; beating; punching; flogging; intimidation; and psychological pressure. Independent observers noted that abuse was not systematic or routinely practiced in PA prisons, although some prisoners experienced abuse during arrest or interrogation. The PA Corrections and Rehabilitation Centers Department, under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, continued to maintain a mechanism for reviewing complaints of prisoner abuse in civil prisons but reported no cases of inmate abuse by its staff.

Detainees held by Hamas filed claims of torture and abuse with the ICHR. Other human rights organizations reported

that Hamas internal security, the drug unit of the "civil police force," and "police" detectives tortured detainees. AI reported that in the Gaza Strip, security elements under the Hamas de facto Ministry of Interior tortured and abused security detainees, persons associated with the PA or the Fatah political party, those held on suspicion of collaboration with Israel, civil society activists, journalists, and those who reportedly engaged in "immoral" activity. Hamas also reportedly employed undercover officers to assault such persons. Palestinian human rights organizations, including the ICHR, contended that torture methods during detention included beating of hands and legs, as well as the use of sticks, insults, humiliation, and sleep deprivation.

Hamas reportedly took little or no action to investigate reports of torture, and reports and documentation of abuses were limited, due to victims' fear of retribution and lack of access to Gaza Strip prisoners' rights NGOs or PA officials.

Human rights organizations such as the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), DCI-Palestine, and Military Court Watch (MCW) reported that "physical interrogation methods" permitted by Israeli law and used by Israeli security personnel could amount to torture. The methods included beatings, forcing an individual to hold a stress position for long periods, and painful pressure from shackles or restraints applied to the forearms. Israeli officials stated they did not use techniques that could amount to torture. Israeli and Palestinian NGOs continued to criticize these and other Israeli detention practices they termed abusive, including isolation, sleep deprivation, and psychological abuse, such as threats to interrogate spouses, siblings, or elderly parents or to demolish family homes.

Israeli authorities reportedly used similar tactics on Palestinian minors. DCI-Palestine, Breaking the Silence, and other human rights NGOs claimed Israeli security services continued to abuse, and in some cases torture, to coerce confessions from minors whom they frequently arrested on suspicion of stone throwing. Tactics included beatings, long-term handcuffing, threats, intimidation, and solitary confinement. In September MCW released a *Briefing Note*, covering the period from January to August, which reported that 90 percent of Palestinian children arrested by the IDF were hand-tied, 81 percent were blindfolded, 61 percent were subjected to physical abuse, and 96 percent were denied access to a lawyer prior to questioning. According to MCW for the first five months of the year, the ISF detained per month an average of 167 Palestinian children between the ages 14 and 17.

In July 2014 a video allegedly identified Israeli border police beating 14-year-old Tariq Abu Khdeir while he was handcuffed and possibly unconscious. The court sentenced the border police officer identified as being responsible for the beating to six weeks of community service as punishment in November, but authorities did not charge a second officer implicated in the beating with any offense.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

The PA Ministry of Health reported prisoners in PA facilities, including in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, suffered from extremely bad conditions.

Prison conditions in the Gaza Strip were reportedly poor, although little information was available.

IDF detention centers for security detainees were less likely than Israeli civilian prisons to meet international standards.

Physical Conditions: Most PA prisons continued to be crowded and lacked ventilation, heating, cooling, and lighting systems conforming to international standards. Most prisons lacked sufficient space for programming, recreation, and medical-care services. Authorities reported no deaths in PA prisons from adverse conditions. Authorities at times held male juveniles with adult male prisoners. Security services used separate detention facilities. Conditions for women were virtually identical to those for men; however, some detention centers for women had limited outdoor recreation space.

Conditions in detention facilities in the Gaza Strip were reportedly below international standards. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that prisoners in Gaza lacked potable water, food, and other basic necessities.

Some Israeli government facilities, such as the Ofer Detention Center, provided living space as small as 15 square feet per detainee. In 2013 B'Tselem reported that since 2009, 64 Palestinian minors had reported "extreme violence," including sexual assault, by authorities in the Israeli police station in the settlement of Gush Etzion. B'Tselem called for an end to violent interrogations and a thorough investigation of what it described as a "systemic" problem. NGOs stated that authorities appeared to use poor conditions as an interrogation or intimidation method. Prisoners also continued to claim inadequate medical care.

According to NGO sources, Israeli government authorities held 6,967 Palestinians in Israeli prisons at the end of December, 6,066 of whom were Palestinian security prisoners or detainees, and the remainder were Palestinians who entered Israel illegally. B'Tselem reported that at the end of December, Israel held 422 minors in Israeli prisons as security prisoners or detainees and 10 others who had entered Israel illegally. Twenty-five of the minors were between the ages of 12 and 15.

PCATI, DCI-Palestine, and Breaking the Silence noted that most reports of abuse or poor conditions occurred during arrest and interrogation, generally within the first 48 hours following arrest.

Administration: Recordkeeping by PA authorities in the West Bank was adequate, with the Corrections and Rehabilitation Centers Department storing information on computers, but records were not publicly available. By law any person sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not more than three months may petition the PA public prosecutor to put him to work outside the prison instead of carrying out the sentence of imprisonment, unless the judgment deprives him of that option. Although the law allows for this option, the legal system did not have the capacity to implement such a process. Although ombudsmen cannot serve on behalf of prisoners, the ICHR played an ombudsman role. The PA investigated allegations of mistreatment.

Little information was available about prison administration in the Gaza Strip.

Recordkeeping by Israeli authorities in the West Bank was often only in Hebrew and, therefore, inaccessible to the Palestinian public. There were no reports of improvements in recordkeeping. There was an ombudsman. Detainees under Israeli control could have visitors. Human rights groups reported families of imprisoned Palestinians, particularly Gazans, had only limited ability to visit prisoners.

NGOs claimed there was a systematic failure to investigate abuse claims. In 2013 PCATI reported that, despite more than 776 complaints it filed since 1999, no torture complaint resulted in a criminal investigation, prosecution, or conviction. This circumstance remained a pattern during the year. PCATI reported that the government regularly

dismissed complaints of abuse following a primary examination by an Israeli Security Agency (ISA) employee. NGOs reported that investigations into IDF and police abuse were slow and ineffective; they rarely led to prosecutions. ISA facilities were exempt from regular independent inspections.

Independent Monitoring: The PA generally permitted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to detainees and allowed regular inspections of prison conditions in accordance with the ICRC's standard modalities. Preliminary unpublished accounts by human rights groups, humanitarian organizations, and lawyers indicated that, as in previous years, there were some difficulties in gaining access to specific detainees, depending on which security organization managed the facility.

The ICRC conducted monitoring visits to some prisoners in the Gaza Strip, but Hamas authorities denied its representatives permission to visit high-profile detainees and prisoners.

The Israeli government permitted visits by independent human rights observers. The government permitted the ICRC to monitor prison conditions in accordance with its standard modalities. NGOs sent representatives to meet with prisoners and inspect conditions in prisons, detention centers, and IDF facilities, except ISA detention and interrogation facilities, since security prisoners and facilities remained inaccessible to independent monitors. Human rights groups reported delays and difficulties in gaining access to specific detainees and frequent transfers of detainees without notice.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Palestinian law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and PA prosecutors generally charged suspects promptly as a requirement to detain them. The PA criminal justice system, however, often did not lead to a prompt and speedy trial. Hamas also alleged that the PA repeatedly detained individuals during the year based solely on their Hamas affiliation, especially during high-profile security sweeps.

Hamas reportedly practiced widespread arbitrary detention in the Gaza Strip, particularly of Fatah members, civil society activists, and others accused of publicly criticizing Hamas.

Israeli law provides safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, but key safeguards do not apply to Palestinian security detainees. Israeli military law subjects Palestinian security detainees to its jurisdiction, which permits eight days' detention prior to appearing before a military court. There is no requirement that a detainee have access to a lawyer until after interrogation, a process that may last weeks. The maximum period for such a detention order, according to military law, is 90 days; however, if deemed necessary by Israeli security forces, authorities can renew detention multiple times. Denial of visits by family, outside medical professionals, or others outside the ISA, the IDF, or the prison service occurred. NGOs reported authorities often held persons undergoing interrogations incommunicado for several weeks. The Israeli government denied such allegations.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

In West Bank Palestinian population centers, mostly Area A as defined by the Oslo-era agreements, containing 55 percent of the Palestinian population on approximately 18 percent of West Bank land area, the PA has formal responsibility for security and civil control. Since 2002, however, following the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Israeli security forces have regularly conducted security operations in Area A cities, often without coordinating with PA security forces. In Area B territory in the West Bank, which contained 41 percent of the population on approximately 21 percent of the territory, mostly small Palestinian villages and farmland, the PA has civil control, but Israel and the PA maintain joint security control. In Area C, which contains Israeli settlements, military installations, and 4 percent of the Palestinian population in small villages, farmland, and open countryside on approximately 61 percent of the land area, Israel retains full civil and security control.

Six PA security forces operated in the West Bank. Many of the security forces are under the PA Ministry of Interior operational control and follow the prime minister's guidance. The Palestinian Civil Police have primary responsibility for civil and community policing. The National Security Force conducts gendarmerie-style security operations in circumstances that exceed the capabilities of the civil police. The Military Intelligence Agency handles intelligence and criminal matters involving PA security force personnel, including accusations of abuse. The Military Intelligence Agency is responsible for investigations into allegations of abuse and corruption involving PA security forces and can refer cases to court. The General Intelligence Service is responsible for external intelligence gathering and operations; the Preventive Security Organization is responsible for both internal intelligence gathering and investigations related to internal security cases (for example, antiterrorism, weapons violations, and money laundering). The Presidential Guard protects facilities and provides dignitary protection. Generally, Palestinian security forces continued to demonstrate professional performance levels, especially while maintaining order during demonstrations on days of national significance to Palestinians, such as the "Nakba" and "Naksa" days, and throughout the period of heightened tensions and demonstrations in the last quarter of the year. The ICHR continued to report accusations of abuse and torture at the hands of the security forces to the PA.

The PA took significant steps to bring women into police forces in the West Bank to allow police work to cross societal gender barriers. Of 8,020 police officers in the PA Civil Police, 315 were women. Women on the PA police force can search under women's clothing for contraband. In March 2014 the PA Presidential Guard established the Female Special Security Detachment, the first operational element for women in the PA security forces.

The PA continued efforts to prevent security-sector courts from trying civilians. There were some NGO reports, however, of unverified incidents of military courts trying civilians, which they noted made it unclear whether security agencies, rather than the civil police, continued to detain civilians, including journalists.

The PA maintained effective control over the security forces and has mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. On September 18, Palestinian Civil Police and National Security Forces personnel were filmed beating a Palestinian protester while preventing a group of demonstrators from reaching an Israeli checkpoint in the Bethlehem area. The PA conducted an investigation, and the trial phase continued at year's end.

In the Gaza Strip, Hamas forces exercised de facto control. Press and NGO reports suggested Hamas enforced strict control across all sectors of society. Impunity remained a problem in the Gaza Strip. HRW noted that the internal security services in the Gaza Strip prohibited them from visiting detention centers. There were numerous instances when Hamas failed to deter violence, such as rocket attacks into Israel.

Israeli authorities maintained their West Bank security presence through the IDF, ISA, Israeli National Police (INP),

and border police. Israeli authorities took some steps to investigate and punish abuse and corruption, but there were reports of failure to take disciplinary action in cases of abuse (see section 1.a.). The IDF continued to open investigations automatically of claims of abuse in military police custody. NGOs stated that automatic investigations applied only to military activity in the West Bank, not to individuals reporting abuse in custody. NGOs reported that impunity among Israeli security forces remained a problem, in part because mechanisms for investigating allegations were not effective. Reports of abuse go to the Attorney General's Office; in 2013 PCATI reported that authorities systematically disregarded abuse allegations.

According to B'Tselem in 2011 Israel began investigating every case in which the IDF killed civilians in the West Bank not taking part in hostilities. According to B'Tselem, in the first four months of the year, the IDF opened investigations into six incidents and closed multiple cases. Israeli law restricts the ability of Palestinians harmed by the acts of Israeli security forces to seek compensation in Israeli courts.

NGOs criticized Israeli accountability processes and efforts to investigate reports of killing of civilians. For example, nearly three years after Israeli security forces shot and killed 16-year-old Samir Awad in the village of Budrus, the court had not indicted either of the two soldiers involved in the killing. The ISF shot and injured Awad while he was reportedly between fences and was trying to flee. The military said he intended to throw stones at the soldiers. On November 8, Israel's High Court of Justice ruled that the State Attorney's Office must file indictments against two soldiers involved in the killing by the end of December. On December 30, the State Attorney's Office filed an indictment on charges of reckless and negligent use of a firearm.

During the year Israeli officials made no response to reports that AI, B'Tselem, and Yesh Din published in 2014 regarding Israeli soldiers using excessive force and noting structural flaws that precluded professional investigations.

According to Israeli and Palestinian NGO and press reports, the IDF and INP did not respond sufficiently to violence perpetrated against Palestinians by Israeli settlers in the West Bank. The number of settler attacks against Palestinians decreased compared with 2014, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). OCHA identified 214 incidents of settler violence as of December 2 (compared with 324 incidents in 2014) that resulted in Palestinian injuries or property damage. The Israeli NGO Yesh Din reported that authorities closed 85 percent of investigative files due to the police investigators' failure to locate suspects or find sufficient evidence to enable an indictment.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) stated Israeli security and justice officials operating in predominantly Palestinian East Jerusalem displayed bias against Palestinian residents in investigating incidents involving Palestinian and Israeli actors. In several cases Palestinian residents in the West Bank sought to press charges against Israeli settlers or their security guards, but many complaints went uninvestigated despite available evidence. In May, Yesh Din released a report entitled *Mock Enforcement* that examined law enforcement treatment of Israeli civilians who reportedly harmed Palestinians in the West Bank. It claimed that law enforcement failures led to meager results in terms of the indictment and conviction of offenders. It contended there was a 1.9 percent probability that a complaint submitted to Israeli police by a Palestinian would lead to an effective investigation resulting in finding a suspect and followed by indictment, trial, and conviction.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

PA law generally requires a warrant for arrest and provides for prompt judicial determination of the legality of detention, and these provisions were largely--but not uniformly--observed; however, there are exceptions that allow for arrest without a warrant. PA law allows police to hold detainees for 24 hours if there is sufficient evidence to charge a suspect, and for up to 45 days with court approval. It requires that a trial start within six months or authorities must release the detainee. While some PA security forces reportedly detained persons outside of appropriate legal procedures, including without warrants and without bringing them before judicial authorities within the required time, there were no known detentions extending beyond the time limit without trial. Authorities generally informed detainees of the charges against them, albeit sometimes not until interrogation. Bail and conditional release were available at the discretion of judicial authorities. Authorities granted detainees access to a lawyer. Palestinian courts consistently afforded the right to counsel to indigents charged with felony offenses. Indigent defendants charged with misdemeanors, however, often did not receive counsel, although NGO efforts to represent indigent juveniles and adults in misdemeanor cases were at times successful.

In a number of cases, PA Military Intelligence reportedly exceeded its legal authority to investigate other security services' personnel and detained civilians suspected of "security offenses," such as terrorist activities. Hamas continued to charge that the PA detained individuals during the year solely due to their Hamas affiliation, but the PA presented evidence it charged many of these individuals with criminal offenses under civil or military codes.

In the Gaza Strip Hamas reportedly detained a large number of persons during the year, primarily without recourse to legal counsel, judicial review, or bail. HRW reported Hamas internal security arrested individuals without presenting warrants, delayed their transfer to the prosecutor's office (using incommunicado detention), did not inform families of detainees' whereabouts promptly, and denied detainees' access to a lawyer. There also were instances in which authorities retroactively issued arrest warrants and used military warrants to arrest civilians.

Israeli authorities operated under military and civilian legal codes in the occupied territories. Israeli military law applied to Palestinians in the West Bank, while Israeli civil law applied to Israeli settlers. Under Israeli military law, authorities can hold detainees for up to 90 days without access to a lawyer, with an unlimited number of 90-day extensions, and authorities frequently transferred detainees from the West Bank to Israel for detention or interrogation. The Israeli military courts had a conviction rate of more than 99 percent for Palestinians. Authorities informed detainees of the charges against them during detention, but MCW reported authorities did not inform minors and their families at the time of arrest. Israeli authorities stated their policy was to post notification of arrests within 48 hours, but senior officers may delay notification for up to 12 days, effectively holding detainees incommunicado during the interrogation process. A military commander may request that a judge extend this period indefinitely. In accordance with law, Israeli authorities generally provided Palestinians held in Israeli military custody inside Israel access to a lawyer of their choice (and provided lawyers for the indigent), but detainees often obtained lawyers only after initial interrogations, and impediments to movement on West Bank roads or at crossings often made consultation difficult and delayed trials and hearings. According to MCW most detained minors saw their lawyer for the first time when they appeared before a military court. There is no functioning bail system for military courts.

NGOs claimed that, despite changes to the law in 2011 that categorized Palestinians between the ages of 16 and 18 as minors, Israeli authorities frequently failed to inform parents why authorities detained their children or where they took Palestinian minors when arrested. Additionally, this amendment does not apply to detention periods and other provisions of military orders. For example, under the law minors who are 16 and 17 years old have the same detention periods as adults. In 2013 a military order reduced the time that Palestinian children between the ages of

12 and 15 can be detained before appearing before a military court judge, although there was no change for minors ages 16 and 17. MCW reported subsequently these detention times were still at least twice as long as those applied to Israeli minors living in the West Bank. MCW was unaware of a single case in which authorities made available to defense counsel an audiovisual tape of an interrogation involving a minor prior to the first hearing. There is no legal duty to record interrogations involving minors audiovisually. The IDF also entered Palestinian homes at night either to arrest or to take pictures of minors. DCI-Palestine claimed authorities abused minors to coerce confessions (see section 1.c.), and, according to human rights organizations, this treatment could amount to torture in some cases. In the past Israeli officials denied such allegations. Military authorities began providing translations into Arabic of some of the recent changes to the military laws affecting minors. NGOs reported a significant increase in detentions of minors in the Jerusalem area, particularly detentions authorities never registered in the Israeli prison system.

On April 30, Israeli security services arrested a six-year-old boy and his 12-year-old brother for throwing stones at a bus. Authorities held the six-year-old in a squad car and eventually brought him to the police station, where police released him to his parents at 3:30 a.m. the next day. According to Israeli law, children younger than 12 years old are below the age of criminal responsibility and authorities may not arrest or detain them.

On October 21, the ISF arrested a 10-year-old boy and took him for investigation from his relative's home in the Silwan neighborhood of Jerusalem. Authorities refused to permit his mother to enter the police station when she attempted to visit him. Authorities also arrested the boy's 13-year-old cousin and interrogated him without the presence of a parent. On October 25, authorities took two brothers, ages six and nine, also from Silwan to an Israeli police station and only released them after several hours. Their parents did not accompany them.

In 2013 the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) released its report *Children in Israeli Military Detention: Observations and Recommendations*, which stated that "mistreatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic, and institutionalized." Subsequently, the military prosecutor for Judea and Samaria (West Bank) established a dialogue with UNICEF on children's rights while in military detention and on specific actions authorities can take to improve the protection of these children. Later in 2013 the IDF Central Command for the West Bank implemented a pilot test in the West Bank that replaced the practice of night arrests of children suspected of security offenses with a summons procedure. UNICEF subsequently documented instances nevertheless of summoning of children following the beginning of the pilot program in Jenin and Hebron, Nablus, and Ramallah governorates. Some children reportedly received summonses at night, and there were continued reports of mistreatment during the subsequent interrogation process at the military detention center or police station. In June 2014 authorities indefinitely suspended this pilot program.

In June the NGO Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling published a report addressing the effects of ISF night raids on families in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The report found that authorities conducted the raids "in a widespread and systematic manner" and noted that they almost universally led to "a sense of fear and terror" among residents, especially children. In August and September, INP conducted night raids in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan, placing dozens of residents under detention or summoning them to INP stations as part of security operations following violence at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and Old City.

In July, HRW released a report claiming that the IDF and other Israeli security services "routinely violated the rights" of Palestinian minors as young as 11 years old. It claimed, "[Israeli] security forces have choked children, thrown stun grenades at them, beaten them in custody, threatened and interrogated them without the presence of parents or lawyers, and failed to let their parents know their whereabouts."

Israeli authorities continued to "administratively detain" (hold suspected criminals indefinitely without presenting charges or going to trial) some persons on security grounds. A military court must approve the detention order, and detainees may appeal this ruling to the Military Appeals Court and to the Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ). The HCJ, however, has yet to free a Palestinian under administrative detention. Many NGOs called for the immediate end to administrative detention. On July 27, the newspaper *Ha'aretz* reported that authorities held 391 Palestinians in administrative detention more than a year after their arrest; authorities had not officially charged them with any crimes.

The ISA continued its practice of incommunicado detention, including isolation from monitors, legal counsel, and family throughout the duration of interrogation. NGOs reported authorities used isolation to punish detainees or silence politically prominent Palestinian detainees; however, according to the Israeli government, the Israeli Prison Service does not hold detainees in separate detention punitively or to induce confessions. The Israeli government stated it does so only when a detainee threatens himself or others, and authorities have exhausted other options--or in some cases during interrogation to prevent disclosure of information. In such cases the Israeli government maintained the detainee had the right to meet with ICRC representatives, Israeli Prison Service personnel, and medical personnel, if necessary.

Arbitrary Arrest: The ICHR reported that arbitrary arrest by the PA in the West Bank was common, particularly arrests based on political affiliation with Hamas. The organization received complaints of arbitrary arrests based on political affiliation in the West Bank. There were numerous reports PA security forces improperly detained Palestinian journalists. Security officials also arrested and abused Palestinians who posted criticism of the PA online, including on their Facebook pages.

The ICHR received complaints of arbitrary arrests by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Many of these arrests and detentions appeared to be politically motivated, targeting political opponents and those suspected of ties to Israel. HRW reported Hamas security forces assaulted and arbitrarily detained civil society activists and peaceful protesters who had called for an end to the Fatah-Hamas split.

Throughout the year there were reports Israeli security forces in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank arbitrarily arrested and detained numerous Palestinian protesters and activists, particularly those participating in demonstrations against the separation barrier or against killings of Palestinians.

Pretrial Detention: It was unclear how long detainees in Hamas custody stayed in pretrial detention or what legal means, if any, Hamas used to detain individuals.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The PA basic law provides for an independent judiciary. The PA generally respected judicial independence and the autonomy of the High Judicial Council and maintained authority over most court operations in the West Bank. PA-affiliated prosecutors and judges stated that IDF prohibitions on movement in the West Bank, including restrictions on

the ability to transport detainees and collect witnesses, hampered their ability to dispense justice. Women served as judges in both the criminal and military court systems.

Until 2011 the PA's military court system had jurisdiction over crimes by civilians against state security or against the security forces. After Palestinian NGOs criticized this practice, the PA mandated that civilians appear before civilian courts. PA security services have pressured the PA military justice court personnel to detain civilians charged with state security violations.

The PA civil, magistrate, and religious courts handled civil suits and provided an independent and impartial judiciary in most matters, but there were unconfirmed reports of various political factions attempting to influence judicial decisions. Citizens have the right to file suits against the government but rarely did so. Seldom-used administrative remedies are available in addition to judicial remedies. Authorities did not always execute court orders.

Hamas-appointed prosecutors and judges operated courts in the Gaza Strip, although the PA considered them illegal. No women served as criminal prosecutors in the Gaza Strip.

Gaza Strip residents may file civil suits. Unofficial anecdotal reports claimed Gaza Strip courts operated independently of the Hamas government and were at times impartial. There were reports that enforcement of court orders improved. HRW reported Hamas internal security regularly tried civil cases in military courts.

Israeli law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected civil court independence. The IDF tried Palestinians accused of security offenses (ranging from rock throwing to membership in a terrorist organization to incitement) in military courts, which some NGOs claimed were inadequate and unfair. Israeli law defines security offenses to include any offense committed under circumstances that might raise a suspicion of harm to Israel's security and which the IDF believes may link to terrorist activity.

Trial Procedures

PA law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and the right to prompt and detailed information regarding the charges with free interpretation as necessary. Trials are public, except when the court determines PA security, foreign relations, a party's or witness' right to privacy, protection of a victim of a sexual offense, or a so-called honor crime requires privacy security, foreign relations, a party's or witness' right to privacy. There are no juries. The law provides for legal representation, at public expense if necessary, in felony cases, but only during the trial phase. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner during the trial, although during the investigation phase, the defendant only has the right to observe. Defendants have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense. Defendants may review government-held evidence, confront or question witnesses against them or present witnesses and evidence during the trial but not during the investigation phase. Suspects and defendants in the PA justice system have a right to remain silent when interrogated by the prosecutor according to the Palestinian penal procedure law. Defendants also have a legal right to counsel during interrogation and trial. They have the right to appeal. Authorities generally observed these rights.

Hamas authorities in the Gaza Strip followed the same criminal procedure law as the PA in the West Bank but implemented the procedures inconsistently.

Israeli authorities tried Israelis living in settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem under Israeli civil law in the nearest Israeli district court. Israeli civil law applied to Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. Israel subjected West Bank Palestinians held by Israeli authorities to trial in Israeli military courts. Military trials of Palestinians and others in the occupied territories provide some, but not all, of the procedural rights granted in criminal courts. The same evidentiary rules used in Israeli criminal cases apply; for example, authorities cannot base convictions solely on confessions. Indigent detainees do not automatically receive free legal counsel for military trials, but almost all detainees had counsel, in part because NGOs represented them. The military courts use Hebrew, but the defendant has the right to simultaneous interpretation at every hearing. Various human rights organizations claimed the availability and quality of Arabic interpretation was insufficient, especially since most interpreters were not professionals. Instead, they were bilingual Israelis performing mandatory military service. Defendants can appeal through the Military Court of Appeals and petition the High Court of Justice. Israeli military courts rarely acquitted Palestinians charged with security offenses, although they occasionally reduced sentences on appeal.

Several NGOs claimed Israeli military courts, which processed thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank during the year, were not equipped to adjudicate each case properly. NGOs and lawyers reported it was better to plead guilty and receive a reduced sentence than to maintain innocence and go through a trial that could last months, if not more than a year. Human rights lawyers also reported the structure of military trials--in military facilities with military officers as judges, prosecutors, and court officials, and with tight security restrictions--limited defendants' rights to public trial and access to counsel.

Authorities continued to use confessions signed by Palestinian minors, written in Hebrew, a language most could not read, as evidence against them in Israeli military courts. NGOs reported that authorities often coerced these confessions during interrogations.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

NGOs reported that arrests on political grounds occurred in the West Bank and Gaza. There was no reliable estimate of the number of political prisoners the PA held during the year.

Hamas detained several hundred persons, allegedly because of their political affiliation, public criticism of Hamas, or collaboration with Israel, and held them for varying periods. Numerous allegations of denial of due process and some executions were associated with these detentions. The ICRC and NGOs had limited access to these prisoners.

The Palestinian NGO Addameer reported that Israel continued to detain PLC members, most of whom had some affiliation with Hamas.

Israeli authorities did not accord administrative detainees an opportunity to refute allegations or access the evidentiary material presented against them in court. Israeli authorities permitted the ICRC access to administrative detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

A citizen can file a suit against the PA, including on matters related to alleged abuses of human rights, but this was uncommon.

Gaza Strip residents may file civil suits, including those related to human rights violations.

Israeli law grants Palestinians the possibility of obtaining compensation in some cases of human rights violations, even when the acts were legal.

Property Restitution

In certain cases the IDF offered opportunities for compensation for demolished or seized homes (see section 1.f.), subject to an appraisal, verification, and appeals process; Palestinians generally refused such offers, citing a desire not to legitimize the confiscation. The Israeli government sometimes charged demolition fees to demolish a home; this policy at times prompted Palestinians to destroy their own homes to avoid the higher costs associated with Israeli demolitions. Palestinians had difficulty verifying land ownership in Israeli courts according to Israeli definitions of land ownership.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The PA Penal Procedure Code generally requires the attorney general to issue warrants for entry and searches of private property; however, Palestinian judicial officers may enter houses without a warrant when there are emergency circumstances.

There were no specific reports the PA harassed family members for alleged offenses by an individual, although NGOs reported this tactic was common.

Hamas authorities in the Gaza Strip frequently interfered arbitrarily with personal privacy, family, and home, according to reporting from local media and NGO sources. NGOs reported numerous cases of home searches and property seizure without warrants. They targeted journalists, Fatah loyalists, civil society members, youth activists, and those whom Hamas security forces accused of criminal activity. Hamas forces monitored private communications systems, including telephones, e-mail, and social media sites. They demanded passwords and access to personal information and seized personal electronic equipment of detainees. While Hamas membership did not appear to be a prerequisite for obtaining housing, education, or government services, authorities commonly reserved employment in some government positions in Gaza, such as those in the security services, for Hamas members only. In several instances Hamas detained individuals for interrogation and harassment based on the purported actions of their family members, particularly prodemocracy youth activists.

The IDF frequently raided Palestinian homes, including in Area A, most often at night, which it stated was due to operational necessity. Under occupation orders only IDF 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 military necessity. There were no reported cases of IDF soldiers punished for acting contrary to this requirement.

In the West Bank and Jerusalem, the Israeli Civil Administration (part of Israel's Ministry of Defense), the Jerusalem municipality, and the Ministry of Interior continued to demolish homes, cisterns, and other buildings and property constructed by Palestinians in areas under Israeli civil control on the basis that these buildings lacked Israeli planning licenses. Authorities generally did not offer compensation in these cases. Properties close to the separation barrier, IDF military installations, or firing ranges also remained subject to a heightened threat of demolition or confiscation. NGOs expressed great concern over demolitions in Area C of the West Bank. For example, in August demolitions reached an all-time high for any month over the past five years. Israeli authorities demolished 131 structures in 34 incidents, which displaced 201 persons.

In July 2014 the Israeli Ministry of Defense's Civil Administration revived a policy of "punitive demolitions," demolishing the home of a suspect in the April killing of an off-duty Israeli police officer in Hebron. With the exception of one such demolition in East Jerusalem in 2009, Israeli authorities had halted punitive demolitions since 2005 following recommendations of a military commission that found the practice did not act as a deterrent.

In response to attacks on Israelis by Palestinians in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Israel, Israeli authorities between October 1 and December 2 partially or fully demolished eight homes of Palestinians who carried out attacks on Israelis in 2014 and during the year. These actions often also rendered dwellings near to demolished homes uninhabitable.

For example, on October 6, Israeli authorities demolished the East Jerusalem home of one of the two perpetrators of the November 2014 Har Nof synagogue attack that killed five persons in Jerusalem. Israeli authorities demolished the home of the second perpetrator on July 8. On December 2, the ISF entered the Shu'fat Refugee Camp in East Jerusalem to demolish the home of a local resident killed after carrying out a vehicle attack in Jerusalem in November 2014 that killed two Israelis and injured 12 others. The ISF injured 43 persons, including at least 13 from the use of rubber-coated bullets, two of whom were UNRWA staff. Some children also suffered from tear gas inhalation. The ISF also detained approximately 1,500 schoolchildren in their schools for about five hours during the operation's duration. On December 3, the ISF carried out an overnight demolition of the Nablus apartment of one of the gunman allegedly involved in the murder of two persons near Itamar settlement on October 1.

Palestinians and human rights NGOs reported the IDF was largely unresponsive to Israeli settlers' actions against Palestinians in the West Bank, including demolition of property (see section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The PA basic law provides every person the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and expression, orally, in writing, or through any other form. PA laws do not specifically provide for freedom of press. PA security forces in the West Bank and members of the Hamas security apparatus in the Gaza Strip continued to restrict freedom of speech and press over the last year--most notably through harassment, intimidation, and arrest.

Israeli law provides for certain protections to Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. Israeli

authorities, however, continued to restrict press coverage and place limits on certain forms of expression in the Palestinian Occupied Territories--particularly by restricting Palestinian journalists' rights of movement and through violence, arrests, and intimidation.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: Although no PA law prohibits criticism of the government, there were media reports PA authorities arrested some journalists and bloggers who either criticized or covered events that criticized the PA and PA officials. Additionally, there were several complaints during the year that the PA prevented journalists from covering events in the West Bank biased toward Hamas.

In the Gaza Strip, individuals publicly criticizing Hamas authorities risked reprisal by Hamas, including arrest, interrogation, seizure of property, and harassment. Civil society and youth activists, social media advocates, journalists, and individuals associated with political factions accused of criticizing Hamas in public fora, such as on the internet, faced punitive measures, including raids on their facilities and residences, arbitrary detention, and denial of permission to travel outside Gaza.

In Jerusalem, Israeli authorities punished displays of Palestinian political symbols and public expressions of anti-Israeli sentiment with fines or imprisonment. Israeli authorities, however, did not always enforce these restrictions. Israeli security officials regularly prohibited or interrupted meetings or conferences held in Jerusalem affiliated with the PLO or the PA, or with PA officials in attendance. They also restricted coverage of incidents that might reflect badly on Israeli policies.

For instance, on August 26, authorities fined two Palestinian journalists, Palestinian Public Broadcasting Corporation cameraman Ali Yasin and Russia Today television cameraman Mohamed Esho, for refusing to leave the scene when ordered to do so by Israeli police outside of al-Aqsa Mosque gates. Yassin stated that as he and his fellow journalists covered Israeli police actions to prevent Muslim worshippers from entering al-Aqsa Mosque, a police officer approached them and asked for their identification cards. Subsequently, he cited them with a fine of 475 shekels (about \$121) for "obstruction of movement." After the intervention of the Jerusalem Municipality Media Department, authorities cancelled the fines.

Many Palestinian journalists working in East Jerusalem or throughout Israel contended that Israeli forces were complicit in permitting extremist Israelis to attack or intimidate Palestinian journalists. For example, on August 16, Jewish Israeli extremists attacked Palestinian Public Broadcasting Corporation correspondent Christine Rinawi and other journalists in front of the Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon in southern Israel, while they covered news related to the deteriorating health of Palestinian prisoner Mohammed Allan. According to the Palestinian journalists on the scene, the Israeli police did nothing to stop the settlers' attacks.

Press and Media Freedoms: Across the occupied territories, independent media operated with restrictions. The PA Ministry of Information requested that Israeli reporters covering events in the West Bank register with the ministry. According to the PA deputy minister of information, the ministry provides permits to Israeli journalists only if they do not live in an illegal settlement. While officially the PA was open to Israeli reporters covering events in the West Bank, Palestinian journalists reportedly pressured Israeli journalists not to attend PA events.

The PA took steps to permit Hamas publications in the West Bank, but it also imposed restrictions on a Hamas television outlet. In May 2014 the PA lifted a West Bank distribution ban on the pro-Hamas *Filistin* and *al-Risala* newspapers. Israeli authorities, however, forced the Ramallah-based printing house to stop printing and distributing these pro-Hamas newspapers in the West Bank. Until November 30, authorities reportedly permitted pro-Hamas al-Aqsa television to work in the West Bank, albeit only by contracting through West Bank communications companies. Subsequently, PA security services circulated instructions to Palestinian communications companies to stop providing all services to al-Aqsa television.

During the 2014 Gaza conflict, Hamas reportedly harassed journalists--including several from Western outlets--to prevent them from reporting on the hostilities in a way that would reflect unfavorably on Hamas or possibly divulge sensitive information.

Hamas modestly loosened some restrictions on PA-affiliated publications in the Gaza Strip, although significant restrictions remained. In May 2014 Hamas lifted its ban on three West Bank-based newspapers--*al-Quds*, *al-Ayyam*, and *al-Hayat al-Jadida*. Hamas authorities permitted broadcast within Gaza of reporting and interviews featuring PA officials. Hamas allowed, with some restrictions, the operation of non-Hamas-affiliated broadcast media in the Gaza Strip. For instance, the PA-supported Palestine TV reportedly operated in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas also sought to restrict the movement of journalists in Gaza--both at crossing points and within the area. On February 3, Hamas security forces in Gaza prevented the chief editor of *Siyasat* magazine and commentator, Atef Abu Seif, from leaving the Gaza Strip to travel to Morocco.

Within areas of the West Bank where Israel controls access, Palestinian journalists complained the Israeli authorities restricted their freedom of movement and ability to cover stories. The IDF does not recognize any Palestinian press credentials or credentials from the International Federation of Journalists. Few Palestinians held Israeli press credentials following the Israeli revocation of the vast majority of their credentials during the Second Intifada, which began in 2000.

Israel does not issue journalists permits to travel into Jerusalem or west of the separation barrier. Palestinian journalists who are able to obtain permits on other grounds, as well as Palestinian Jerusalemite journalists, reported incidents of harassment, racism, and occasional violence when seeking to cover news in Jerusalem, especially in the Old City and its vicinity. For example, on June 21, Israeli authorities prevented Tahsin al-Astal, the deputy head of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate and the Gaza editor of *al-Hayat al-Jadida* daily, from entering the West Bank to participate in the General Secretariat meeting of the syndicate in Ramallah.

Palestinian journalists reportedly also faced discrimination, harassment, and violence in Jerusalem. On August 4, cameraman Abdul Karim Darwish of al-Bashir ProMedia was covering the arrest of five security guards of al-Aqsa Mosque when Israeli police seized his camera, detained him, and interrogated him at a police station in Jerusalem. Subsequently, authorities released him without charge.

Violence and Harassment: There were numerous reports that PA security forces harassed, detained (occasionally with violence), prosecuted, and fined journalists during the year. Moreover, PA security forces also at times reportedly demanded deletion of footage showing security personnel. For example, on July 8, the Palestinian Intelligence Service arrested and detained Ro'ya Media cameraman Amr Halayqa for five days, during which officials interrogated him and another journalist, Haitham Warasneh. Authorities accused them of inciting against the PA. They appeared before a judge, who, after verifying their credentials as journalists, released them.

Some Palestinian journalists claimed the PA obstructed the activities of media organizations with Hamas sympathies and limited media coverage critical of the PA. For instance, on March 17, the Palestinian Intelligence Service arrested Radi Karameh, presenter at Radio Alhuriya, after raiding his house. Authorities interrogated him and charged him with "libel and defamation" against the Palestinian president and senior officials. Karameh said the interrogators insulted him and yelled at him that his reporting should be "patriotic" and free of any criticism of the president. He added that authorities told him not to cover anti-PA activities and subsequently released him.

On November 5, the PA ordered the closure of the Ramallah office of Qatar-funded *al-Araby al-Jadid* newspaper, accusing the paper of lacking proper licensing requirements and for publishing malicious news about the PA security services.

The PA had an inconsistent record of protecting Israeli and international journalists from harassment by Palestinian civilians or their own personnel.

In the Gaza Strip, Hamas at times arrested, harassed, and pressured journalists, sometimes using violence. Reportedly, Hamas summoned and detained journalists for questioning to intimidate them. Hamas also constrained journalists' freedom of movement during the year, attempting to ban access to some official buildings as well as to several prodemocracy protests.

For example, on April 29, Hamas security officers attacked journalists covering a peaceful rally calling for an end to the internal division. Security officers badly beat the journalists, and detained a number of them briefly. The Foreign Press Association reported other Hamas tactics to harass or restrict journalists, including efforts to establish "vetting procedures" that would effectively blacklist certain reporters or sending a series of intimidating text messages to journalists.

Throughout the year there were dozens of reported Israeli actions that prevented Palestinian journalists from covering news stories in the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem. These actions included harassment by Israeli soldiers and acts of violence against journalists. On May 2, the IDF suppressed a peaceful march organized by the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate for World Press Freedom Day. Israeli security forces fired rubber bullets and tear gas at the participating journalists, injuring several journalists including the head of the syndicate, Abdelnasser Najjar.

Palestinian journalists also claimed that Israeli security forces detained Palestinian journalists and forced them to delete images and videos under threat of violence or arrested/administrative detention. For instance, on August 28, at a demonstration in Bil'in village near Ramallah, IDF soldiers detained Hamza Yaseen, a volunteer photographer with B'Tselem. Reportedly soldiers beat him and deleted the images in his camera's memory before smashing the camera. Authorities then arrested him and transferred him to the Benyamin police center before releasing him after midnight.

From October through November, there were many reports of Palestinian journalists injured by rubber-coated steel bullets/live fire or tear gas while covering demonstrations and clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli security forces. On October 30, IDF soldiers physically attacked several journalists trying to cover clashes between Palestinian stone throwers and the IDF near Beit El at the outskirts of Ramallah. Israeli soldiers kicked and pepper sprayed a number of cameramen and photographers as they covered the clashes. Israeli soldiers also assaulted and pepper sprayed Palestinian paramedics, who rushed to the scene to assist the injured reporters.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The PA prohibits calls for violence, displays of arms, and racist slogans in PA-funded and controlled official media. There were no confirmed reports of any legal action against, or prosecution of, any person publishing items counter to these PA rules. Media throughout the occupied territories reported practicing self-censorship.

In Gaza civil society organizations reported Hamas censored television programs and written content, such as newspapers and books.

While Israeli authorities retain the right to review and approve in advance the printing of all Jerusalem-based Arabic publications for material perceived as a security threat, anecdotal evidence suggested Israeli authorities did not actively review the Jerusalem-based *al-Quds* newspaper or other Jerusalem-based Arabic publications. Jerusalem-based publications reported that, based on previous experiences with Israeli censorship, they learned what was acceptable and self-censored publications accordingly.

The Israeli government closed or threatened to close a number of West Bank radio broadcasters, primarily under allegations of incitement to violence against Israeli citizens. In November the Israeli government shut three radio stations in Hebron and confiscated broadcasting equipment. On November 3, the IDF closed Fatah-affiliated Hurriyah Radio; on November 21, the IDF shut al-Khalil Radio; and on November 28, the IDF raided and closed Dream Radio. The IDF threatened two other Palestinian radio stations with closure for alleged incitement to violence. On November 27, al-Nas Radio, one of the two leading stations in Jenin, north of the West Bank, received an IDF warning letter to cease and desist incitement to violence. The previous day, on November 26, a Hebron-based independent Radio One FM received the same IDF letter.

Additionally, on August 27, the IDF threatened to shut the Alreef radio station near Hebron alleging the station's broadcast interfered with Ben Gurion Airport's operations, although the station has been broadcasting since 2007. According to the station manager, Mahmoud Diab, he received a call from an Israeli intelligence officer three months before this incident in which the intelligence officer accused the station of incitement against Israelis. Despite the military order, the station continued to broadcast.

Over the past two years, Palestinian local broadcaster Wattan TV faced additional setbacks in its legal efforts to retrieve its foreign-funded equipment confiscated in 2012 by the IDF from its Ramallah Studio (in Area A of the West Bank). In June 2014 the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected Wattan's petition challenging the confiscation of its equipment, following several hearings during which authorities did not allow Wattan's lawyers, for security reasons, to view the evidence the IDF presented against Wattan. While attorneys for Wattan TV contended they proved the broadcasts posed no threat to communications in Israel (such as airport communications), they complained about an opaque legal process that allowed the government to withhold testimony from the parties to the case based on security concerns. The case remained pending at year's end.

Libel/Slander Laws: There were some accusations of slander or libel against journalists in the West Bank as well as suppression of journalists on national security grounds. For example, on August 5, the PA Preventive Security Service arrested freelance journalist and editor of *Quds News Network* Yousef Shalabi from Tulkarem. Authorities interrogated him about charges of "inciting sectarian strife" in his reporting. He spent a night in jail before a court date was set for October 6.

In Gaza there were reports, specifically during the Gaza conflict of 2014, that Hamas used security justifications or slander or libel laws to censor public criticism. For instance, on August 5, the Hamas public prosecutor summoned Mushera al-Haj, a journalist for *Bawabet Alhadaf* electronic newspaper, regarding a Facebook comment criticizing the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip, after the death of a child at the al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. Authorities accused her of libel and defamation for her posting. After refusing to apologize, al-Haj said authorities arrested her and took her to al-Ansar Prison. Officials subsequently released her.

There were some reports Israeli authorities used security justifications or slander or libel laws to censor public criticism.

Internet Freedom

While there were no PA restrictions on access to the internet, there were reports that the PA actively monitored e-mail and social media, pressuring and harassing activists and journalists. There were multiple instances when the PA arrested or detained Palestinians because of their posts on social media. For example, on July 21, the Military Intelligence Service in Tulkarem summoned the editor at al-Fajr al-Jadid TV, Sami al-Sai, for his posting on Facebook about security officers selling gasoline coupons, which were for official use only. During his interrogation authorities asked him to provide the names of his sources, including the officer who allegedly sold those coupons. Authorities subsequently released him without charge.

Palestinian civil society organizations and social media practitioners stated Hamas authorities monitored the internet activities of Gaza Strip residents and took action to intimidate or harass them. For instance, on July 8, Hamas's Internal Security in Gaza interrogated freelance journalist and media student Tareq al-Farra about his writings on Facebook. Authorities summoned al-Farra to Internal Security headquarters in Khan Younis, blindfolded him, and placed him in a detention room where they instructed him to remain standing. Authorities then interrogated him about his writings and postings on Facebook in which he criticized the Hamas government's decision to close the Jawwal telecom company. Authorities then forced him to surrender his password to his Facebook page and to write an apology on his Facebook account. Authorities released him but instructed him not to change his Facebook password.

Israeli authorities did not restrict access to the internet. They did monitor Palestinians' online activities, however, and arrested a number of Palestinians for incitement, including for posts on social media. For example, media reported that Jerusalem District Police arrested Jerusalem-based, Arab-Israeli attorney Tareq Barghout on suspicion of publishing material that incited violence on Facebook. Barghout was the defense attorney in a high-profile stabbing case.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

In the West Bank, the PA did not restrict academic freedom, and there were no known reports of PA censorship of school curricula, plays, films, or exhibits in the West Bank. Palestinian law provides for academic freedom, but individuals or officials from academic institutions reportedly self-censored curricula. There were no reports the PA officially interfered with education during the year. While there was no overt threat to academic freedom, faculty members knew there were security elements present on university campuses among the student body and faculty, which may have led to self-censorship.

Public and UNRWA schools in Gaza followed the same curriculum as West Bank schools. Palestinians in Gaza reported that generally there was limited interference by Hamas--the de facto authority in Gaza--at the primary, secondary, or university levels. In Gaza public schools, Hamas reportedly interfered in teaching methodologies or curriculum deemed to violate Islamic identity, the religion, or "traditions," as defined by the de facto Hamas authority. Hamas interfered if there were reports of classes or activities that mixed genders. UNRWA reported no such Hamas interference in its Gaza schools.

Hamas authorities sought to disrupt some educational, cultural, and international exchange programs. They routinely required Palestinians to obtain exit permits prior to departing Gaza. Students participating in certain cultural and education programs (including programs sponsored by foreign governments and international organizations) can face questioning from de facto Hamas authorities, for example, on the purpose and duration of travel and the process for coordinating the visas. These authorities can and did deny exit for travelers, whether through the Rafah or Erez crossings.

Hamas authorities also interfered in local cultural programs. There were continued reports the de facto government suppressed cultural expression that might offend local religious and cultural values and identity.

Armed conflict in the Gaza Strip resulted in damage to schools, which at times restricted access to education by Palestinian residents. For example, at least 90 schools in the Gaza Strip were destroyed during engagements between Israeli government forces and Hamas militants during Operation Protective Edge. In addition some persons displaced by the conflict sheltered in school buildings. The start of the 2014-15 school year was delayed as a result. Further, Israeli restrictions on movement adversely affected academic institutions and access to education in the West Bank, because Israeli checkpoints, although they decreased in number, created difficulties for students and faculty commuting to schools and university campuses. In numerous instances students and educators reported being late or missing days of classes due to significant delays at checkpoints (see section 2.d.). Additionally, Palestinian students and educators reported harassment and physical assault by Israeli settlers when going to school in areas such as Hebron, Nablus, Salfeet, and Qalqilya. Local press reports cited instances of students incarcerated by Israeli authorities for taking part in demonstrations deemed unlawful and for allegedly throwing stones at Israeli soldiers.

Palestinian government officials and Palestinian university officials accused the ISF of attacking several university campuses, especially in areas close to Israeli settlements. In particular, officials from the al-Quds University Abu Dis campus accused Israeli soldiers of harassing Palestinian university students on campus and attempting to provoke them into confrontations. In August the university's Abu Dis campus issued a press release accusing Israeli forces of throwing tear-gas grenades into the campus and igniting a fire on university grounds. On November 9, al-Quds University administrators invited diplomatic staff from international missions in Jerusalem and the West Bank to survey damage to the campus grounds caused by two ISF attacks that took place on October 28 and November 2. University surveillance cameras showed the ISF entering the university campus shooting rubber-coated bullets and live fire, sound grenades, and tear gas without any apparent immediate threat, causing dozens of injuries. Additionally, the Palestine Technical University--Khadoori in Tulkarem--which is also the site of an active Israeli military facility, was the site of clashes between students and Israeli soldiers. From December 16 to 20, the IDF injured 87 students at the university by using live fire, rubber bullets, and tear gas to disperse demonstrations on campus.

During the year the Israeli Supreme Court continued to uphold with few exceptions the 2000 Israeli ban on students from the Gaza Strip attending West Bank universities. Students in the Gaza Strip generally did not apply to West Bank universities because they understood Israeli authorities would deny permit requests. During the year Israeli authorities several times prevented students at schools adjacent to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif from reaching their classrooms.

Israeli travel restrictions also prevented students in the West Bank and Gaza from participating in cultural programming within the Palestinian Territories and study programs abroad. In some instances Israeli officials denied Palestinian travel permits, thus preventing transit to Jerusalem for visa interviews or to cross the Allenby Bridge to Jordan. In other cases delays in permit approvals by Israeli officials caused Palestinians to miss the travel dates for their exchange programs abroad or to miss cultural programming in Jerusalem or the West Bank. In some instances students were asked to submit to security interviews prior to receiving permits. In the past two years, Israeli authorities detained some students indefinitely without charge following their security interview--which caused some students to refuse to attend security interviews due to fear of detention, which made them unable to obtain a travel permit.

The travel challenges were particularly acute for Palestinians from Gaza, since Israeli authorities often denied travel permits through Erez. In these instances Palestinians from Gaza could elect to travel through the Rafah crossing, but Egyptian authorities have closed Rafah, opening the crossing only for special categories of travelers for 12 days during the year. With the increase in commercial activity between Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel, Israeli border officials increased the detention and interrogation of Palestinians from Gaza traveling with business permits.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

Palestinian law permits public meetings, processions, and assemblies within legal limits. It requires permits for rallies, demonstrations, and large cultural events, and the PA rarely denied them. Both the PA and Hamas security forces, however, selectively dispersed protests and demonstrations during the year.

According to a Hamas decree, any public assembly or celebration in the Gaza Strip requires prior permission, in contradiction of the PA basic law. Hamas generally did not permit Fatah members to hold rallies. Activists reported Hamas officials harassed women in public and impeded their ability to assemble peacefully.

Hamas officials also attempted to impede potential criticism of Hamas policies by imposing arbitrary demands for the approval of meetings on political or social topics.

ACRI continued to report arbitrary restrictions on the freedom of assembly in Jerusalem, including the use of unlawful arrests to intimidate demonstrators.

The IDF continued to use a 1967 military order that effectively prohibited Palestinian demonstrations and limited freedom of speech in the West Bank. The order stipulates that a "political" gathering of 10 or more persons requires a permit from the regional commander of military forces--which the commander rarely granted. The penalty for a breach of the order is 10 years' imprisonment or a heavy fine.

Various NGOs noted the IDF did not respect freedom of assembly and often responded to demonstrators aggressively. Israeli security forces sometimes used force, including live fire, against Palestinians and others involved in demonstrations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, resulting in the deaths of Palestinian civilians (see section 1.a.). The IDF used force particularly against weekly protests in or near Israeli settlements located in Area C. The IDF responded to protests with military crowd-control techniques or force, using tear gas and stun grenades to push back protesters, which NGOs alleged often amounted to using nonlethal force in a lethal manner.

The IDF Central Command declared areas of the West Bank to be "closed military zones" and maintained the same designation for areas adjacent to the separation barrier in the villages of Bil'in and Ni'in every Friday during the hours in which Palestinian, Israeli, and international activists regularly demonstrated. There were frequent skirmishes between the protesters and IDF personnel. IDF and Israeli police personnel stationed on the far side of the barrier during weekly protests in those villages responded to rock throwing with tear gas, stun grenades, skunk water, sound bombs, and rubber-coated bullets. On October 31, doctors at a Bethlehem hospital pronounced eight-month-old Muhammad Faysal Thawabta dead after he inhaled tear gas during clashes in the Beit Fajjar village, south of Bethlehem. An IDF spokesperson said an investigation into the incident concluded that the IDF had not used tear gas in the vicinity of the baby's family home, but "dozens of meters" away.

Freedom of Association

In the West Bank, PA law allows freedom of association, but authorities sometimes limited it, including for labor organizations (see section 7.a.). In August the media reported that the PA froze the assets of Future for Palestine, an NGO established by former PA prime minister Salaam Fayyad.

In the Gaza Strip, Hamas attempted to prevent various organizations from operating, including some it accused of being Fatah-affiliated, as well as private businesses and NGOs it deemed to be in violation of its interpretation of Islamic social norms. The Hamas "Ministry of Interior" has supervisory authority over all NGOs, allowing the ministry to request documents, and there were instances where the de facto authorities temporarily closed NGOs that did not comply. Activists reported women's rights groups faced significant pressure from Hamas.

Israel maintained prohibitions on some prominent Jerusalem-based Palestinian institutions, such as the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce and the Orient House, which was the de facto PLO office in Jerusalem. Israeli authorities have closed both since 2001 and claimed the groups violated the Oslo Accords by operating on behalf of the PA in Jerusalem.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The PA basic law provides for freedom of movement, and the PA generally did not restrict freedom of movement. The basic law does not specify regulations regarding foreign travel, emigration, or repatriation.

Hamas authorities in the Gaza Strip restricted some foreign travel and required exit permits for Palestinians departing through the Gaza-Israel Erez crossing. Hamas also prevented the exit of some Palestinians from Gaza because of the purpose of their travel or coerce a behavior change, such as the payment of taxes and fines. There were some reports unmarried women faced restrictions on their travel.

The ISF imposed the most significant restrictions on Palestinians' movement within the occupied territories and foreign travel, and, citing military necessity, it increased these restrictions at times.

Barriers to movement included checkpoints, a separation barrier that divides the majority of the West Bank from Israel and East Jerusalem, internal road closures, and restrictions on the movement of persons and goods into and out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Restrictions on movement affected virtually all aspects of life, including access to places of worship, employment, agricultural lands, schools, and hospitals, as well as the conduct of journalistic, humanitarian, and NGO activities.

Israeli authorities claimed they eased the naval blockade off the Gaza Strip coast, extending fishing limits from three to six nautical miles following the 2014 conflict. Authorities fired at fishing boats that moved within the six-mile mark or towed them to Israeli ports and detained fishermen.

The PA, Hamas, and the Israeli government generally cooperated with humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons and refugees; however, Israeli government officials imposed controls on the entry and exit of goods and persons to and from Gaza and constrained UNRWA's ability to operate freely in Gaza. AI and HRW also reported that the Israeli government denied their employees permits to enter Gaza.

In-country Movement: PA authorities did not interfere with movement within the West Bank.

Hamas authorities in general did not appear to enforce routine restrictions on internal movement within the Gaza Strip, although there were some areas to which Hamas prohibited access, and, for many months this year, Hamas imposed checkpoints at night at many intersections in cities to prevent movement of Salafist groups it considered security risks. Increasing pressure to conform to Hamas's interpretation of Islamic norms led to significant restrictions on movement by women. IDF soldiers routinely detained Palestinians residing in Gaza who have permits to enter Israel and conduct business for hours and subjected them to interrogations and strip searches at Israeli-controlled checkpoints.

The Israeli government imposed significant restrictions on movement in the West Bank and between the West Bank and Jerusalem. Israeli authorities frequently prohibited travel between some or all West Bank towns and deployed "flying" (temporary) checkpoints. Palestinians who lived in affected villages stated that such "internal closures" continued to have negative economic effects. During periods of potential unrest including on some major Israeli, Jewish, and Muslim holidays, Israeli authorities enacted "comprehensive external closures," which precluded Palestinians from leaving the West Bank. For example, Israeli authorities blocked three of the four main entrances into Tulkarem with dirt mounds in late October and early November. This action was a result of a vehicle attack wherein the attacker fled back to Tulkarem. After authorities arrested the assailant in December, the ISF removed the closures, and all entrances returned to normal in Tulkarem by year's end. While the exact number and placement of closures fluctuated, at the end of 2014, OCHA reported 490 closures including not just permanently staffed checkpoints, but also partial checkpoints, earth mounds, road closures, road blocks/barriers, earth walls, and trenches.

Palestinian travel is restricted or entirely prohibited on 41 roads and sections of roads throughout the West Bank, including many of the main traffic arteries, covering a total of more than 400 miles of roadway, upon which Israelis may travel freely. The IDF also imposed temporary curfews confining Palestinians to their homes during arrest operations. During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Israeli authorities eased restrictions on Palestinians entering Jerusalem and Israel, allowing men over the age of 40 to visit the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount without a permit for the first time in more than 10 years.

The Israeli government continued construction of the separation barrier, which ran largely inside the West Bank and along parts of the Green Line (the 1949 Armistice line). By use of special permits, Israel continued to restrict movement and development within this area, including access by some international organizations. NGOs reported that Israeli authorities allowed many Palestinians, separated from their land, access to their property only a few days each year. Private security companies employed by the Israeli government controlled many points of access through the barrier, and international organizations and local human rights groups claimed these companies did not respond to requests to allow movement of goods and officials through the barrier. Many Palestinians and NGOs reported there were higher levels of mistreatment at checkpoints run by security contractors than at those staffed by IDF soldiers. The barrier affected the commute of children to school in Jerusalem and some farmers' access to land and water resources. Palestinian farmers continued to report difficulty accessing their lands in Israeli-controlled Area C and in the seam zone, the closed area between the separation barrier and the Green Line. The NGO Machsom Watch reported that more than 24 Palestinian villages had lands inaccessible in the seam zone, and a complicated Israeli permit regime (requiring more than 10 different permits) prevented Palestinians from fully using their lands.

Israel eased restrictions on access to farmland in the Gaza Strip to 100 meters from the boundary with Israel and to fishing areas along the coast. Despite this easing, reports indicated Israel continued to enforce "buffer zone" restrictions on nonfarmers within 328 feet of the boundary. OCHA estimated nearly 35 percent of the Gaza Strip's cultivable land was located in the restricted area.

Gaza's fishing waters were partially inaccessible to Palestinians due to Israeli restrictions that only allowed fishing within six nautical miles of land. The UN reported that the restriction was "of particular concern." Israeli naval patrol boats strictly enforced this fishing limit, which was a reduction from 20 nautical miles, as designated under the 1994 Agreement on the Gaza Strip and Jericho Area (later incorporated into the 1995 Interim Agreement). Israeli naval forces regularly fired warning shots at Palestinian fishermen entering the restricted sea areas, in some cases directly targeting the fishermen, according to OCHA. The Israeli armed forces often confiscated fishing boats intercepted in these areas and detained the fishermen, while Palestinian fishermen reported confusion over the exact limits of the new fishing boundaries.

During the year Israeli security forces restricted movement around parts of Jerusalem, including the neighborhoods of Beit Hanina, Shufat, Silwan, Ras al-Amud, Wadi al-Joz, al-Tur, Jabal al-Mukabir, and Jerusalem's Old City, where forces established roadblocks and checkpoints. Israeli security forces also blocked entrances to the Jerusalem neighborhood of Issawiya and frequently established checkpoints at other entrances, inspecting each person entering or leaving the neighborhood. The Israeli government imposed new restrictions on Palestinians and Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem during the evening of October 14, installing checkpoints, barriers, and other obstacles to free movement. During the following weeks, the Israeli government adjusted the number of restrictions. At least 16 obstacles remained in place as of November 23, according to OCHA. Military authorities continued to restrict severely Palestinian vehicular and foot traffic in the commercial center of Hebron, citing a need to protect several hundred Israeli settler residents. They prohibited Palestinians from driving on most roads in downtown Hebron and from walking on Shuhada Street and other roads in the Old City; Israeli settlers had free access to these roads. The IDF closed most shops on the street and sealed entrances to Palestinian houses. Demolition orders in and around Hebron also threatened family homes, and other civilian structures; in some cases authorities subjected entire villages, such as Dkaika, southeast of Hebron, to demolition orders. In November, Israeli forces restricted Palestinian males between 15 and 25 years old from entering certain neighborhoods of Hebron; they required other residents to register with the Israeli authorities to pass through certain checkpoints.

The INP restricted access for broad categories of Muslim worshippers based on age or gender on 27 days during the year, sometimes during periods of unrest, and sometimes corresponding to periods of increased Jewish visits to sites during or on days surrounding Jewish holidays. The restrictions limited Muslim access for noon prayers on at least four Fridays, and included consecutive days of restrictions as long as eight days in the nine-day period from September 28 to October 6. Additionally, the INP, beginning September 3, maintained a "black list" of female Muslim worshippers banned from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for alleged harassment of Jewish visitors. The banned women had no recourse to appeal their prohibition with the INP or through the Israeli court system.

Following a series of attacks by Palestinians on Israelis in Jerusalem in September and October, in an unprecedented move, Israeli authorities barred all non-Old City resident Palestinians from entering the Old City for two days during the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah.

Foreign Travel: PA authorities did not limit residents' foreign travel.

Hamas authorities in the Gaza Strip enforced movement restrictions on Palestinians attempting to exit Gaza to Israel via the Erez Crossing and to Egypt via the Rafah Crossing. Individuals permitted to enter or exit the Gaza Strip at the Erez Crossing were largely limited to humanitarian cases; the Israeli government also continued to permit a limited number of businesspersons to cross.

Egyptian authorities enforced movement restrictions on Palestinians attempting to exit Gaza via the Rafah Crossing. The Egyptian government only periodically allowed border crossing two or three days at a time--and mostly only in one direction for passenger travel and humanitarian aid.

Restrictions on access to Jerusalem had a negative effect on patients and medical staff trying to reach the six Palestinian hospitals that offered specialized care unavailable in the West Bank. IDF soldiers at checkpoints harassed and delayed Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) ambulances from the West Bank or refused them entry into Jerusalem even in emergency cases. When ambulances lacked access, medics moved patients across checkpoints from an ambulance on one side to a second ambulance (usually one of five East Jerusalem-based ambulances) or a private vehicle on the other side. The PRCS reported hundreds of such actions taken against its teams and humanitarian services during the year. Most incidents included blocking access to those in need, preventing their transport to specialized medical centers, or maintaining delays at checkpoints for up to two hours. Most incidents took place at the Qalandiyah and Az-'Za'ayem checkpoints leading to Jerusalem; the remainder took place at other checkpoints circling the West Bank.

The IDF restricted students in the Gaza Strip from studying in the West Bank or Israel and limited West Bank Palestinians from university study in Jerusalem and Israel (see section 2.a.). Palestinians possessing Jerusalem identity cards issued by the Israeli government needed special documents to travel abroad. Upon individual requests by Palestinians, the Jordanian government issued passports to them.

According to NGOs residency restrictions prevented family reunification, which did not qualify as a reason to enter the West Bank. For a child in the Gaza Strip, Israeli authorities permitted access to a parent in the West Bank only if no other relative was resident in the Gaza Strip. Israeli authorities did not permit Palestinians abroad during the 1967 War, or whose residence permits the Israeli government subsequently withdrew, to reside permanently in the occupied territories. It was difficult for foreign-born spouses and children of Palestinians to obtain residency. Authorities required Palestinian spouses of Jerusalem residents to obtain a residency permit with reported delays of several years to obtain them.

Exile: Neither the PA nor Hamas imposed forced exile.

Continued Israeli revocation of Jerusalem identity cards amounted to forced exile to the occupied territories or abroad. According to HaMoked, an Israeli human rights organization, the Israeli Ministry of Interior during the year again renewed "temporary" orders authorizing the revocation of Jerusalem residency rights from legal residents. Between 1967 and 2014, Israel revoked the status of 14,416 Palestinians from East Jerusalem. Reasons for revocation included having acquired residency or citizenship in another country, living "abroad" (including in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip) for more than seven years, or, most commonly, being unable to prove a "center of life," interpreted as full-time residency, in Jerusalem. Some Palestinians who were born in Jerusalem but who studied abroad reported losing their Jerusalem residency status.

Internally Displaced Persons

OCHA estimated that by August 2014, hostilities during Operation Protective Edge internally displaced 520,000 persons in Gaza, who sought shelter in UNRWA schools, public buildings, or with other families. Thousands remained in UNRWA shelters following the cessation of hostilities because their homes were no longer habitable. UNRWA reported it was able to close the last remaining emergency shelters on June 17 after providing transitional shelter to those who required it. The UN reported that fighting damaged or destroyed more than 143,000 Palestinian refugee dwellings. As of September only 6.7 percent of construction materials required to rebuild and repair houses destroyed and damaged during the 2014 fighting and previous hostilities, and to address natural population growth, had entered Gaza.

As of December 2, Israel demolished 499 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and East Jerusalem. According to OCHA a number of policies drove displacement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; these included displacements

linked to settlement activity. In Area C and East Jerusalem, authorities annually demolished hundreds of Palestinian homes and other structures due to residents' lack of Israeli-issued building permits. According to OCHA and ACRI, residence restrictions made it almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain permits in Area C and East Jerusalem, while providing preferential treatment for Israeli settlements in these areas. OCHA noted that in many cases displacement resulted from a combination of factors, including settler violence, movement restrictions, and restricted access to services and resources. Authorities also displaced Palestinians in East Jerusalem due to forced evictions, facilitating takeover of their property by settler organizations, and making it difficult for Palestinians to secure residency status.

UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations provided services to IDPs in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, with some limitations due to Israeli restrictions on movement and border access.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: There were no reports of persons seeking asylum in the occupied territories. According to an UNRWA estimate, as of January 1, there were 774,167 registered Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and more than 1.27 million in the Gaza Strip. One-quarter of refugees in the West Bank lived in refugee camps, as did approximately 40 percent of refugees in Gaza. Refugees included those displaced due to the 1948 conflict in Israel and their descendants.

Refugee Abuse: The Israeli government obstructed refugee access to UNRWA-provided humanitarian assistance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israeli government restrictions on import of certain commodities considered dual use continued to impede UNRWA operations. In August, UNRWA reported that an updated dual-use goods list issued by the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories restricted wood more than one centimeter (three-eighths inch) thick. For UNRWA this new restriction was expected to limit production of doors for infrastructure projects and furniture for its schools in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli security operations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem led to both injuries and fatalities among Palestinian refugees. In 2013 and 2014, UNRWA reported a sharp increase in the number of Palestinian refugees killed and injured during law enforcement activities carried out by Israeli security forces in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. During the year this trend persisted, and the continued frequent use of live ammunition remained a serious concern. In 2014 there were 21 refugee fatalities, all but one of them caused by live ammunition. From January to November, there were 37 refugee fatalities, including 17 Palestinians allegedly involved in attacks/attempted attacks on ISF personnel or Israeli civilians, and 557 injuries. All but two of the 37 fatalities resulted from live ammunition, as did 199 of the 557 injuries.

On March 18, Israeli soldiers shot 20-year-old Ali Mahmoud Abd a-Rahman Safi, who later died of his injuries, during a violent demonstration at the al-Jalazun Refugee Camp in the West Bank governorate of Ramallah.

On June 10, Israeli soldiers shot and killed 22-year-old 'Iz a-Din Walid Hassan Bani Gharrah in the Jenin Refugee Camp. Accounts differed regarding the circumstances surrounding his death.

Access to Basic Services: All UNRWA projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip required Israeli government permits.

During the first 11 months of the year, movement restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities on the West Bank resulted in the loss of 71 UNRWA staff days. Since September 2014 Israeli authorities demanded UNRWA trucks use only commercial crossings into Jerusalem, where they faced significant delays, long detours, and increased search demands, compared with the checkpoints used previously. UNRWA reported that delivery of services was problematic in the area between the West Bank barrier and the 1949 armistice line, in particular in the Bartaa area and in three refugee communities near Qalqilya. Essential infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, including water and sanitation services, continued in a state of severe disrepair, due in part to inability to import spare parts and components due to Israeli import restrictions. During Operation Protective Edge, Israeli armed forces destroyed electrical, water, and other public infrastructure.

The deterioration of socioeconomic conditions during the year severely affected refugees in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA reported that food security continued to deteriorate due to the effect of Operation Protective Edge on livelihoods, tunnel closures, and increases in food prices.

A shortage of school buildings during the year meant that quality of education was a major problem, resulting in a double-shift system, shorter hours, and overcrowding of students.

Stateless Persons

According to NGOs 40,000 to 50,000 individuals in the Gaza Strip did not have identification cards recognized by Israel. Some of these persons were born in the Gaza Strip, but Israel never recognized them as residents; some fled the Gaza Strip during the 1967 war; and some left Gaza for various reasons after 1967 and later returned. A small number were born in the Gaza Strip and never left, and they had only Hamas-issued identification cards. The Israeli government controlled the Palestinian Population Registry that would allow stateless persons to obtain status.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The PA basic law provides Palestinians with the ability to elect their government through democratic means, but the PA has not held elections in the West Bank or Gaza since 2006; Israeli authorities ban the PA from conducting political activities in East Jerusalem. Residents of the Gaza Strip, under Hamas control since 2007, were unable to choose their own government or hold it accountable. Civil society organizations in the Gaza Strip stated that Hamas and other conservative Islamist groups did not tolerate public dissent, opposition, civic activism, or the promotion of values contrary to their political and religious ideology.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In 2006 voters elected the 132-member PLC in a process under the PA basic law that international

observers concluded generally met democratic standards in providing citizens the ability to change their government peacefully. Hamas-backed candidates participated in the 2006 PLC elections as the "Change and Reform Movement" and won 74 of 132 seats. Fatah won 45 seats, and independents and candidates from third parties won the remaining seats. The PLC lacked a quorum and did not meet during the year. Although the Israeli government and the PA followed mutually agreed guidelines for Palestinians residing in Jerusalem to vote in 2005 and 2006, Israeli authorities did not allow all Palestinians in Jerusalem to vote, and authorities required those who could vote to do so via post offices (of which there were few), thereby impeding their ability to vote. No date was set for new national elections by year's end.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The PA allowed a diversity of political parties to exist but limited the ability of Hamas members to campaign and organize rallies, although PA officials slightly eased this policy during the year. In Gaza Hamas allowed other political parties to exist but severely restricted their activities.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Legally women and minorities can vote and participate in political life on the same basis as men and nonminority citizens, although women faced significant social and cultural barriers in the West Bank and Gaza. There were 17 women in the 132-member PLC, which represented West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem districts, and there were three women in the 23-member cabinet. There were seven Christians in the PLC and three in the cabinet. Hamas excluded women from leadership positions.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

Palestinian law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government respected the law, making progress in investigations and prosecutions during the year.

Corruption: The PA's anticorruption commission consisted of special prosecutors and an anticorruption court with a panel of three judges. The PA attorney general has responsibility for combating official corruption. There were allegations of corrupt practices among Fatah officials, particularly the theft of public funds and international assistance funds.

In the Gaza Strip, local observers and NGOs alleged instances of Hamas complicity in corrupt practices, including preferential purchasing terms for real estate and financial gains from involvement in the illegal tunnel trade by Hamas security forces, but authorities severely inhibited reporting and access to information.

Financial Disclosure: PA ministers were subject to financial disclosure laws.

Public Access to Information: PA law requires official PA institutions to "facilitate" acquisition of requested documents or information by any Palestinian, but it does not require agencies to provide such information. Reasons for denial generally referred to privacy rights and the necessity of security. Authorities made inadequate effort to train officials on the implementation of the law.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Palestinian human rights groups and several international organizations generally operated without PA restriction, and officials cooperated with their efforts to monitor the PA's human rights practices. Several PA security services, including General Intelligence and the Palestinian Civil Police, appointed official liaisons who worked with human rights groups.

In the Gaza Strip, Hamas routinely harassed civil society groups, including by dissolving and closing peaceful organizations. Gaza-based NGOs reported that Hamas representatives appeared at their offices to assure compliance, seek tax payments, and summoned NGO representatives to police stations for questioning.

Palestinian, Israeli, and international NGOs monitored the Israeli government's practices in the occupied territories and published their findings, although movement and access restrictions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip made it difficult to work. The Israeli government permitted some human rights groups to hold and publish press conferences, and it provided the ICRC with access to most detainees.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: PA and Israeli officials generally cooperated with and permitted visits by UN representatives or other organizations, such as the ICRC, although there were numerous reports the Israeli government blocked the delivery of humanitarian aid. There were numerous reports Hamas harassed members of international organizations.

The UN reported continued difficulty accessing seam zone communities in the northwestern West Bank due to what they considered Israeli authorities' excessive demands for searches of personnel, including UN employees, based on their nationality.

In July 2014 the Human Rights Council established an international commission of inquiry "to investigate all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the 'Occupied Palestinian Territory,' including East Jerusalem, particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip, in the context of the military operations conducted since June 13." The government of Israel announced it would not cooperate with the commission of inquiry stating that it unfairly focused on Israel and not on terrorist attacks by Hamas. In June 2014 the commission of inquiry presented findings that there were credible allegations of war crimes committed in 2014 by both Israel and Palestinian armed groups. The report expressed concern about the inherently indiscriminate nature of rockets and mortars fired at Israeli civilians by Palestinian armed groups, condemned the killing of persons suspected of being collaborators, and said Palestinian authorities consistently failed to bring violators of international law to justice. The commission also expressed concern regarding Israel's extensive use of weapons with a wide kill and injury radius. Although these weapons were not illegal, their use in densely populated areas was highly likely to kill combatants and civilians indiscriminately. It also stated that impunity generally prevailed regarding violations allegedly committed

by Israeli forces, in both Gaza and the West Bank.

In November 2014 the UN Secretary-General announced a board of inquiry to investigate attacks on UN facilities in Gaza during Operation Protective Edge and incidents in which the IDF found weapons at those facilities. In April the board of inquiry released findings that Israel was responsible for damage to seven UN facilities in the Gaza Strip during Operation Protective Edge. The board also concluded that Palestinian militant groups used three UN facilities for storing weapons and for firing rockets and mortar shells.

Palestinian officials announced they submitted an instrument of ratification to the UN Secretary-General as the depositary for the Rome Statute and lodged an ad hoc declaration accepting the International Criminal Court's (ICC) jurisdiction as of June 13, 2014. Following this announcement, the ICC Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) stated that it was opening a preliminary examination to determine whether there were crimes committed within the court's jurisdiction on the territory of the "State of Palestine." Palestinian officials indicated that they continued to submit information regarding alleged crimes to the OTP. Israeli officials strongly opposed the preliminary examination but maintained communication with the OTP.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The ICHR continued serving as the PA's ombudsman and human rights commission. The ICHR issued monthly and annual reports on human rights violations within Palestinian-controlled areas; the ICHR also issued formal recommendations to the PA. The ICHR was generally independent but faced resource shortages that limited its ability to work effectively.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

PA law prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, religion, political opinion, national origin or citizenship, social origin, sexual orientation or gender identity, age, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, language, or social status. PA authorities worked to enforce these laws but often failed to do so. Some laws are discriminatory. For example, it is illegal for a Palestinian to sell land to Israelis, an offense punishable by death.

Hammas, despite remaining under the authority of Palestinian laws prohibiting discrimination, continued to implement discriminatory policies based on race, political affiliation, gender, and sexual orientation.

Many NGOs alleged Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza amounted to racial and cultural discrimination, citing legal differences between the treatment of Palestinians and Jewish settlers in the West Bank.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is illegal under PA law, but the legal definition does not address spousal rape. Laws that apply in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip relieve of any criminal responsibility rapists who marry their victim. Authorities generally did not enforce the law effectively in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. Punishment for rape is five to 15 years in prison. Societal norms led to significant underreporting. There were reports police treated rape as a social and not a criminal matter and that authorities released some accused rapists after they apologized to their victims.

PA law does not explicitly prohibit domestic violence, but assault and battery are crimes. Authorities did not enforce the law effectively in domestic violence cases. NGOs reported women were frequently unwilling to report cases of violence or abuse to police due to fear of retribution, and HRW reported that authorities prosecuted few domestic violence cases successfully in recent years. Many women and girls stated they believed the legal system discriminated against women. According to the PA's Central Bureau of Statistics, violence against wives, especially psychological violence, was common in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Police often treated domestic violence as a social instead of criminal matter and regularly returned victims to assailants.

The mandate of the PA Ministry of Women's Affairs is to promote women's rights. This strategy highlighted multiple challenges Palestinian women faced that require the attention, cooperation, and coordination of public institutions, NGOs, and the private sector, as well as international and regional organizations supporting women's problems. It serves as a reference for developing appropriate and gender-responsive policies to influence positively the socioeconomic and political conditions of women and men and enable women to enjoy fully their rights in equity within Palestinian society.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): There were reports FGM/C occurred in the past, but none during the year. It is prohibited by law.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: Provisions of Palestinian law discriminate against women. In 2011 President Abbas signed an amendment to the "honor killing" law that removed protection and leniency for perpetrators of crimes in defense of "family honor," although some NGOs argued the amendment did not apply to the most relevant articles of the law and thus did not have a noticeable effect. There were no reports that any honor killings occurred during the year.

Sexual Harassment: No law specifically relates to sexual harassment, and it was a significant and widespread problem. The Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces and other NGOs reported that for some women, cultural taboos and fear of stigma compelled them to remain silent about sexual harassment. Some women claimed that when they reported harassment, authorities held them responsible for provoking men's harassing behavior. Authorities in Gaza harassed women for "un-Islamic" behavior, including being in public after dark and walking with an unrelated man.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Jerusalem had access to contraception. They lacked information regarding family planning, although UNRWA continued holding workshops for Palestinian men, underscoring their role in family planning. According to the UN Population Fund, in 2014, 43 percent of girls and women ages 15 to 49 used a modern method of contraception. High workload, poor compensation, and resource shortages across the occupied territories continued to affect skilled attendance during labor and postpartum care, much of which midwives provided. Authorities and community and international NGOs operated HIV/AIDS

education, prevention, and screening programs, but there was limited information about the equality of services provided for women.

Infant mortality in Gaza rose during the year for the first time in more than half a century, according to UNRWA. The number of babies dying before they were four weeks old rose from 12 to 20 per 1,000 live births in the space of five years. There were more deaths among mothers and newborns in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. The PA Ministry of Health attributed continued increases in the number of home births to difficulties in reaching hospitals (see section 2.d.).

Discrimination: While the law provides for equality of the sexes, it also discriminates against women, as do traditional practices. Women can inherit, but not as much as men. Men may take more than one wife; although they rarely did so in urban areas, the practice was more common in small villages. Women may add conditions to marriage contracts to protect their interests in the event of divorce and child custody disputes, but they rarely did so. Societal pressure generally discouraged women from including divorce arrangements in a marriage contract. Cultural restrictions associated with marriage occasionally prevented women from completing mandatory schooling or attending college. Families sometimes disowned Muslim and Christian women who married outside their religious group. Local officials sometimes advised such women to leave their communities to prevent harassment.

Hamas enforced a conservative interpretation of Islam on the Gaza Strip's Muslim population that particularly discriminated against women. Authorities generally prohibited public mixing of the sexes. Plainclothes officers routinely stopped, separated, and questioned couples to determine if they were married; premarital sex is a crime punishable by imprisonment. Hamas's "morality police" also punished women for riding motorcycles, smoking cigarettes or water pipes, leaving their hair uncovered, and dressing "inappropriately" (that is, in Western-style or close-fitting clothing, such as jeans or T-shirts). Women living in refugee camps in the Gaza Strip stated they felt unsafe using public bathing or latrine facilities.

Palestinian labor law states work is the right of every capable citizen; however, it regulates the work of women, preventing them from taking employment in dangerous occupations (see section 7.d.). The Ministry of Labor decree No. 2 for 2004 prohibits women from working in mining and quarrying, fireworks production, asphalt production, all types of alcohol production, pesticides production, all kinds of welding activities, and in forests and natural reserves, including lumber-related work.

Female education rates were high, particularly in the West Bank, and women's attendance at universities exceeded that of men. Female university students, however, reported discrimination by university administrators, professors, and their male peers, according to the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces. In February 2014 Hamas implemented a "modest" dress code at al-Aqsa University in Gaza, drawing criticism from the PA minister of higher education.

According to press and NGO reports, in some instances teachers in Gaza sent girls home for not wearing conservative attire in Hamas-run schools, although enforcement was not systematic.

Children

Birth Registration: The PA registers Palestinians born in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and Israel requires the PA to transmit this information to the Israeli Civil Administration. Since the PA does not constitute a state, it does not determine "citizenship" alone. Children of Palestinian parents can receive a Palestinian identity card (issued by the Israeli Ministry of Defense's Civil Administration), if they are born in the occupied territories to a parent who holds a Palestinian identity card. The PA Ministry of Interior and the Israeli Civil Administration both play a role in determining a person's eligibility.

Israel registers the births of Palestinians in Jerusalem, although Palestinian residents of Jerusalem reported delays in the process.

Education: Education in PA-controlled areas is compulsory from age six through the ninth grade (approximately 16 years of age). Education is available to all Palestinians without cost through high school.

In the Gaza Strip, primary education is not universal. UNRWA and authorities in Gaza provided instruction. In addition to the PA-provided curriculum, UNRWA provided specialized classes on human rights, conflict resolution, and tolerance. There were reports Hamas instituted courses on military training in its schools.

In Jerusalem, Palestinian children did not have access to the same educational resources as Israeli children, and NGOs reported that East Jerusalem needed additional classrooms in official municipal schools to provide adequate space for Palestinian children to attend official schools (see section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities). The Jerusalem municipality added 194 classrooms in East Jerusalem between 2009 and 2014.

Child Abuse: Child abuse was reportedly a widespread problem. The law prohibits violence against children; however, PA authorities rarely punished perpetrators of family violence.

Israeli security forces also were responsible for violence against children in custody and during arrest (see section 1.c.) in the West Bank or near the Gaza Strip buffer zone, according to NGO and UN reports.

Doctors Without Borders reported the number of children with posttraumatic stress disorder and other anxiety disorders, including depression, increased in recent years. The organization attributed a majority of the cases to trauma experienced during Israeli military incursions or to settler violence.

Early and Forced Marriage: Palestinian law defines the minimum age for marriage as 18; however, religious law allows persons as young as 15 years old to marry. Child marriage did not appear to be widespread, according to NGOs, including the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling. According to UNICEF data for the year, 2 percent of girls were married by the age of 15.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The PA considers statutory rape a felony based on the Jordanian penal code, which also outlaws all forms of pornography. Punishment for rape of a victim less than age 15 includes a minimum sentence of seven years.

Child Soldiers: There were reports Hamas trained children as combatants.

Displaced Children: Conflict and demolition orders (see section 2.d.) displaced children in the occupied territories. B'Tselem reported home demolitions displaced children in the West Bank and East Jerusalem during the year.

Anti-Semitism

Approximately 370,000 Jewish settlers lived in the West Bank. The Jewish population in Gaza, aside from foreign nationals, was nonexistent. There were an estimated 250,000 Jewish residents of East Jerusalem.

Rhetoric by some Palestinians and Muslim religious leaders included expressions of anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial. Anti-Israel sentiment was widespread and sometimes crossed the line into anti-Semitism in public discourse, including media commentary longing for a world without Israel and glorifying terror attacks on Israelis. Following a string of attacks by Palestinians on Israelis in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Israel, Palestinian press and social media widely circulated cartoons encouraging such attacks.

At times the PA failed to condemn incidents of anti-Semitic expression in official PA traditional and social media outlets.

In the Gaza Strip and West Bank there were instances in which media outlets, particularly outlets controlled by Hamas, published and broadcast material that included anti-Semitic content, sometimes amounting to incitement to violence.

Trafficking in Persons

No PA law specifically prohibits trafficking in persons, and reportedly small numbers of children and adults experienced forced labor in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There were reports some children worked in forced labor in the West Bank, including in settlements.

NGOs reported employers subjected Palestinian men to forced labor in Israeli settlements in industry, agriculture, construction, and other sectors. The PA was unable to monitor and investigate abuses in these areas and elsewhere because it did not control its borders and the Israeli government limited its authority to work in Areas B and C.

Persons with Disabilities

The PA ratified Palestinian Disability Law in 1999, but NGOs complained of very slow implementation. The law does not mandate access to buildings, information, or communications, although UNRWA's policy was to provide accessibility in all new structures. The disability rights NGO Bizchut reported a lack of accessible transportation services in East Jerusalem.

Palestinians with disabilities continued to receive inconsistent and poor-quality services and care. The PA depended on UN agencies and NGOs to care for persons with physical disabilities and offered substandard care for persons with mental disabilities. There were reports Israeli authorities placed in isolation without a full medical evaluation detainees deemed mentally disabled or a threat to themselves or others. According to Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, isolation of prisoners with mental disabilities was common.

Familial and societal discrimination against persons with disabilities existed in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

According to OCHA an estimated 27,500 Bedouin lived in Area C in the West Bank. UNRWA registered many of them as refugees, and Bedouins frequently inhabited areas designated by Israel as closed military zones or as areas planned for settlement expansion. Forced displacement by the Israeli government continued of Bedouin and herding communities in Area C, and many of these communities suffered from limited access to water, health care, education, and other basic services.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Palestinian law, based on the 1960 Jordanian penal code, prohibits consensual same-sex sexual activity, although the PA did not prosecute individuals suspected of such activity. Societal discrimination based on cultural and religious traditions was commonplace, making the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza challenging environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons. Some Palestinians claimed PA security officers and neighbors harassed, abused, and sometimes arrested LGBTI individuals because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. NGOs reported Hamas also harassed and detained persons due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

While the PA Ministry of Health provided treatment and privacy protections for patients with HIV/AIDS, societal discrimination against affected individuals was common. Anecdotal evidence suggested societal discrimination against HIV/AIDS patients was also very common in Gaza.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

OCHA, the Jerusalem Legal Aid Society and Human Rights Center, and other NGOs reported attacks by Israeli

settlers on Palestinians and their property in the West Bank. The attacks included direct violence against Palestinian residents. Some Israeli settlers reportedly used violence against Palestinians to harass them and to keep them away from land settlers sought to acquire.

Various human rights groups continued to claim authorities insufficiently investigated and rarely prosecuted settler violence. Some groups attributed this circumstance in part to the Israeli Civil Administration's neglect of Palestinian complaints, as well as to Palestinian residents' reluctance to report incidents due to fears of settler retaliation or because they were discouraged by the lack of accountability in most cases. The Israeli NGO Yesh Din stated that authorities closed more than 90 percent of Israeli investigations of offenses against Palestinians in the West Bank without indictments.

On February 25, a group of suspected settlers on motorcycles from the West Bank settlement of Beitar Illit fired at Palestinian residences in the West Bank village of Nahalin. There were no reports of injuries.

On February 25, suspected settlers vandalized and set fire to a mosque in the village of Jab'a near Bethlehem. They wrote Hebrew graffiti on the walls that stated, "Revenge for the Land of Zion" and "Price Tag."

On July 31, unidentified assailants attacked and destroyed by fire two homes in the Palestinian village of Douma. The fire burned to death 18-month old Ali Dawabsheh. On August 8, his father, Saad Dawabsheh, also died from his burns, and, on September 6, his mother, Riham, died. Authorities found Hebrew graffiti with the words "Revenge" and "Long Live King Messiah" painted on the homes and nearby walls. Both PA President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu condemned the attack. As of year's end, there were no arrests for the attack, although on September 9, Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon stated that it was highly probable "an extreme group of Jews" committed the crime.

Following the murder of two Israeli settlers on October 2, there were reports of an increase in attacks by settlers on Palestinians. On the morning of October 17, 18-year-old Hebron resident Fadel al-Qawasmeh was walking to work when an Israeli settler civilian shot and killed him. Israeli military authorities reported al-Qawasmeh had a knife and intended to stab the Israeli civilian and that an investigation was underway. AI claimed that the military released no evidence to support these claims, although video cameras operated by Israeli forces heavily monitor al-Shuhada Street, where the incident took place. B'Tselem reported that locals claimed the IDF planted the knife on al-Qawasmeh, which observers could not confirm without documentation from videos that remained in the IDF's possession.

On October 23, a knife-wielding Jewish extremist attacked Arik Ascherman, the president of Israeli human rights organization Rabbis for Human Rights while he assisted Palestinian workers with the olive harvest in a Palestinian olive grove near Itamar.

"Price tag" attacks (property crimes and violent acts by extremist Jewish individuals and groups in retaliation for activity they deemed antisettlement) continued.

In February the Lod District Court in Israel sentenced three West Bank settlers convicted of planning and carrying out a 2013 price tag attack in the West Bank village of Far'ata, adjacent to the illegal settlement outpost of Havat Gilad. Authorities convicted the settlers of burning two Palestinian-owned vehicles and painting Stars of David on village walls. The verdict noted that because one settler, Binyamin Richter, refused to cooperate during his interrogation, he received the harshest sentence of those convicted: three years imprisonment, a one-year suspended sentence, and a fine of 15,000 Israeli new shekels (NIS) (approximately \$4,000) to compensate the Palestinian victims. Additionally, his involvement in the attack violated a house arrest order that authorities had imposed on him earlier, related to other judicial proceedings. In his defense the accused argued that his actions, which he said were only spray-painting graffiti, were nonviolent and not incitement to violence. The court sentenced the other two settlers involved in the price tag attack, Yehuda Landsberg and Yehuda Savir, to 30-months' imprisonment following plea bargains. Media reported that Shin Bet (Israel's security service) described the three as radical, right-wing activists, two of whom previously associated with other violent acts.

Access to social and commercial services in Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including housing, education, and health care, was available only to Israelis. Israeli officials discriminated against Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem regarding access to employment and legal housing by denying Palestinians access to registration paperwork. In both the West Bank and Jerusalem, Israeli authorities often placed insurmountable obstacles in the way of Palestinian applicants for construction permits, including the requirement they document land ownership in the absence of a uniform post-1967 land registration process, high application fees, and requirements that new housing be connected to often unavailable municipal works.

According to B'Tselem in 2000 Israel began curtailing the Palestinian population registry by denying paperwork to Palestinians and effectively declaring Palestinians illegal residents. Some Palestinians defined as illegal residents faced harassment, arrest, or deportation to the Gaza Strip.

The World Bank reported that Palestinians suffered water shortages and purchased approximately half of their domestic water supply from Israel. Oslo-era agreements limited the amount of water Palestinians can draw from West Bank aquifers. According to AI, Palestinians received less than the World Health Organization's prescribed minimum daily water supply to maintain basic hygiene standards and food security. Political constraints limited the PA's ability to improve water network management and efficiency, including the requirement for Israeli approval to implement water-related projects and the PA's lack of authority in Area C to prevent theft from the network, as well as the PA's own management problems.

The Israeli military continued to destroy water cisterns, some of which donor countries had funded for humanitarian purposes. The Israeli military also destroyed unlicensed Palestinian agricultural wells, particularly in the Jordan Valley area of the West Bank, claiming they depleted aquifer resources.

Palestinians living within the borders of the Jerusalem Municipality, but cut off from it by the separation barrier, reported that the municipality failed to provide basic services, including water, police, and infrastructure.

NGOs alleged that Jerusalem municipal and Israeli national policies aimed at decreasing the number of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. Government-sponsored construction of new Israeli housing units continued, while building permits were difficult to obtain for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, and authorities demolished homes built by Palestinian residents without legal permits. The Israeli NGOs Bimkom and Ir Amim stated that Palestinians in East Jerusalem continued to face barriers to purchasing property or obtaining building permits. Authorities generally zoned land owned or populated by Palestinians (including Israeli-Palestinians) for low residential growth. Authorities designated approximately 30 percent of East Jerusalem for Israeli residents. Palestinians were able in some cases to rent Israeli-owned property, but they were generally unable to purchase property in an Israeli neighborhood. Israeli

NGOs stated that only 13 percent of all land in East Jerusalem was available for construction and that, in the Israeli neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, land was not available for Palestinian construction.

The Israeli government and Jewish organizations in Jerusalem made efforts to increase Israeli property ownership or underscore Jewish history in predominantly Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem.

Although Israeli law entitles Palestinian residents of Jerusalem to full and equal services provided by the municipality and other Israeli authorities, the Jerusalem Municipality failed to provide sufficient social services, infrastructure, emergency planning, and postal service for Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem. According to ACRI, 75 percent of Jerusalem Palestinians lived in poverty, and 82 percent of East Jerusalem children lived below the poverty line. There was a chronic shortage of more than 1,100 classrooms in East Jerusalem's official school system, and despite commitments made by Israeli authorities and a high court ruling that the municipality must fill the gap of missing classrooms in East Jerusalem by 2016, authorities built only 194 classrooms in the last five years. Authorities largely segregated bus services in Jerusalem between Israelis and Palestinians. Light-rail service completed in 2010 served both Palestinian and Israeli populations and crossed into East Jerusalem; NGOs reported, however, that of the 24 stops on the light rail, only five were in Palestinian neighborhoods.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

PA law provides for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions and conduct legal strikes. The law requires conducting collective bargaining without any pressure or influence but does not explicitly provide for the right to collective bargaining. Antiunion discrimination and employer interference in union functions are illegal, but the law does not specifically prohibit termination due to union activity.

The PA labor code does not apply to civil servants or domestic workers, although the law allows civil servants the right to form unions. The requirements for legal strikes are cumbersome, and strikers had little protection from retribution. Prospective strikers must provide written warning two weeks in advance of a strike (four weeks in the case of public utilities). The PA Ministry of Labor can impose arbitration; workers or their trade unions faced disciplinary action if they rejected the result. If the ministry cannot resolve a dispute, it can be referred 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, and finally to a specialized labor court.

The government did not effectively enforce labor laws and subjected procedures to lengthy delays and appeals. Penalties and enforcement were insufficient to deter violations. Authorities had not fully implemented the PA's labor law at year's end, and labor unions claimed the current system favored employers. During the year the Ministry of Labor implemented a provision of the Labor Law by conducting periodic medical examination of workers. Authorities had not established a specialized labor court as required by labor legislation. Some judges received training in labor regulations, which reportedly shortened the time to process a labor case to approximately one year. The PA enforced the prohibitions on antiunion discrimination and employer interference in union functions; however, it inconsistently enforced laws regarding freedom of association. The PA did not seek to enforce collective bargaining rights for unions, with the exception of those representing PA employees. Hamas continued to maintain de facto control of the government and worker rights in Gaza, where the PA was unable to enforce labor law.

The PA respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining with some significant exceptions. In November 2014 PA security forces arrested Bassam Zakarneh, head of the PA Public Employees Union, along with his deputy, following the completion of a long-term partial strike as well as a one-day full strike to protest the lack of a cost-of-living allowance. The PA's Ministry of Labor released a statement justifying the arrests under a 2012 presidential declaration that the union "operated without union status" and was therefore in violation of PA laws. Authorities subsequently released both men pending trial. The judge in the case repeatedly postponed the trial, most recently on December 2.

Public-sector workers engaged in some protests and strikes over delayed or partial payment of wages at the beginning of the year. In the first months of the year, Palestinian health workers in Gaza staged multiple strikes to protest the PA's failure to pay their salaries, at times bringing all medical services in Gaza to a halt. Teachers, who comprise the most significant portion of the public-sector work force, also demonstrated against partial pay at the same time.

Labor unions were not independent of authorities and political parties.

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.

Israeli law applies to Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem, but authorities did not enforce it uniformly. Despite a 2008 high court ruling requiring Israeli law to be applied to workers in settlements, most settlements applied Jordanian labor law to Palestinian workers, which was the applicable law prior to 1967 and provides for lower wages and fewer protections than Israeli law. Palestinian workers in Jerusalem often joined West Bank unions or the Israeli General Federation of Labor (Histadrut); however, they could not vote in Histadrut elections.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

Forced labor occurred in the occupied territories. PA law does not expressly forbid forced or compulsory labor or human trafficking. Women working as domestic workers were vulnerable to forced labor conditions in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, since the PA does not regulate domestic labor within households or in the large informal sector. Forced child labor also occurred (see section 7.c.).

Also see the Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The Palestinian Authority has no unified or comprehensive set of child labor laws. The 2000 Unified Labor Law and the 2004 Palestinian Child Law prohibit the employment of any person under age 15. The law classifies children as persons under age 18 and it restricts employment for those between 15 and 18. The law permits hiring children between ages 15 and 18 for certain types of employment under set conditions. The law allows children younger than age 15 to work for immediate family members under close supervision.

The law prohibits children from working more than 40 hours per week, operating certain types of machines and equipment, performing work that might be unsafe or damage their health or education, and working at night, in hard labor, or in remote locations far from urban centers. A 2012 presidential decree amended the law to include provisions on child labor accompanied by explicit penalties for violations. Authorities can penalize repeat offenders by having fines doubled and/or full or partial closure of their facility. Fines and enforcement were not sufficient to deter violations.

In 2014 the PA strengthened coordination within its local Child Protection Networks and streamlined the legal process for child labor cases in its courts, but it did not expand enforcement capabilities. The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for coordinating efforts to protect children's rights, while the Ministry of Labor's Inspection and Protection Administration is responsible for enforcing the law. The Ministry of Labor reported that nearly 30 percent of its labor inspectors (similar to 2014) had training and experience in dealing with child labor, a proportion it recognized as insufficient, although an increase from prior years. During site visits Ministry of Labor inspectors raised awareness among business owners that labor by children under the age of 15 was illegal under Palestinian law.

Due to inadequate resources and logistical difficulties, PA authorities did not effectively enforce the law. Many cases of child labor violations reportedly occurred in home environments, for example, on family farms, which were not open to labor ministry inspection. Child protection officers with the Ministries of Social Affairs and Labor reported that they referred only employers who hired children less than age 15 to work in dangerous conditions or hazardous jobs to the attorney general for prosecution; the ministry referred only a few cases during the year. The government reported approximately 600 cases of child labor violations during the year. In almost all cases, authorities removed children after the inspections. In many cases the employer called the parents to come and take the child while the inspectors from the labor ministry were present. The Ministry of Labor requires that employers keep lists of employees, including children, although some employers reportedly did not keep accurate records of children they employed, hiding them from inspection. In recent years PA officials reported fining "numerous" persons after successful investigations conducted by the PA Ministry of Labor. The ministry inspected only businesses operating in the formal economy and was unable to conduct investigations in the Gaza Strip. It did not have access to Israeli-controlled Area C of the West Bank (nearly 60 percent of the West Bank), where child economic exploitation and labor were most likely to occur, according to PA officials.

In the third quarter of the year, the PA estimated that 5 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 17 worked in the West Bank and Gaza--6.7 percent in the West Bank and 2.4 percent in Gaza. Palestinian child laborers generally worked on family farms, in shops, as roadside and checkpoint street vendors, in car washes, in factories, or in small manufacturing enterprises. They were vulnerable to forced labor. Conditions were especially poor for Palestinian children working as street vendors, many of whom worked all day without food or water and who were subjected to abuse. The 2013 statistics of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics showed that approximately 80 percent of children ages 10 to 17 who worked did not attend school.

Hamas reportedly did not enforce child labor laws in Gaza; in some cases Hamas reportedly encouraged children to work gathering gravel and scrap metal from bomb sites to sell to recycling merchants. There were reports Hamas trained children as combatants.

The Israeli government stated it did not issue permits for Palestinian West Bank residents younger than age 18 to work in Israeli settlements, except in the Jordan Valley, where the law allows work permits for persons age 16 and older; however, according to the PA, children entered the settlements or crossed into Israel, often through being trafficked, to seek work. The PA reported that Palestinian children engaged in child labor in Israeli settlements in the West Bank faced security problems, exploitation, and harassment since they did not have access to legal protection or labor inspection.

Also see the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law and regulations do not prohibit discrimination regarding race, language, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, or social status. Laws prohibit discrimination based on gender and disabilities; however, the government did not effectively enforce those laws and regulations.

There was discrimination based on the above categories with respect to employment and occupation. Women endured prejudice and, in some cases, repressive conditions at work. Women's participation in the workforce was extremely low, particularly in Gaza, although gradually growing, according to PA statistics (see section 6, Women).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The PA cabinet approved a minimum wage of 1,450 new Israeli shekels (\$370) per month, which went into effect at the beginning of 2013, but 36.1 percent of wage employees received less than the minimum wage. In the West Bank, approximately 21.4 percent of wage employees in the private sector received less than the minimum monthly wage; these approximately 50,000 wage employees had an average monthly wage of 1,064 NIS (\$271). In Gaza 66.7 percent of wage employees in the private sector received less than the minimum monthly wage; these approximately 74,700 wage employees had an average monthly wage of 730 NIS (\$186). Palestinians working in Israeli settlements reported they continued to receive wages lower than the Israeli minimum wage, despite a 2008 high court ruling that Israeli labor laws apply to relations between Palestinian workers and Israeli employers in settlements in the occupied territories. In 2011, the date of the most recent official estimate, the PA estimated 25.8 percent of residents in the occupied territories lived below the poverty line of 7.49 NIS (\$1.90) per day.

According to PA law, the maximum official Sunday to Thursday workweek was 48 hours. The law also allows for paid official and religious holidays, which employers may not deduct from annual leave. Workers must be paid time and a half for each hour worked beyond 45 hours per week and may not perform more than 12 hours of overtime work per week.

The PA Ministry of Labor was responsible for setting occupational health and safety standards, but its enforcement ability was limited, in part due to lack of staff. The ministry employed 42 labor inspectors during the year, including 12 to focus on child labor; ministry officials estimated they would need at least 300 inspectors to enforce the labor laws adequately. The PA did not effectively monitor smaller worksites, which were at times below legal safety standards. Workers do not have the legal protection to remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment.

The PA was unable to monitor labor conditions in the Gaza Strip and had no authority to monitor labor safety in the 60 percent of the West Bank designated as Area C under the terms of Oslo-era agreements with Israel. The ministry cannot enforce Palestinian labor law in seam zones, the area east of the Green Line and west of Israel's barrier wall, in Israel (where Palestinians were employed on permits or illegally), or in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. 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. Israeli NGOs brought some cases in Israeli labor courts on behalf of Palestinian workers employed by enterprises in the settlements. The PA Ministry of Labor reported the number of Palestinians who raised cases against settlers during the year remained very low.

Occupational safety and health were poor. The large informal sector included work in illegal smuggling tunnels between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. Most dangerous work conditions were in rubble, garbage, and other solid waste collection, street vendor work, manufacturing, construction, car mechanic work, and work in metal workshops, on poultry farms, in gravel collection, and in building demolition.

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