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1. Home (<https://www.gov.uk/>)
 2. The State of Israel and The Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) - Human Rights Priority Country 2015 to 2016 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-state-of-israel-and-the-occupied-palestinian-territories-opts-human-rights-priority-country>)
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1. Foreign & Commonwealth Office (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office>)

Corporate report

Human Rights Priority Country status report: July to December 2016

Updated 8 February 2017

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1. West Bank including East Jerusalem

Between July and December, violence across the West Bank significantly declined. But the situation remained volatile with an uptick in attacks against Israeli security personnel and civilians in September. From 1 July to 31 December, attacks perpetrated by Palestinian civilians resulted in three Israeli deaths (two civilians, one soldier) and 54 injuries. These were apparent 'lone-wolf' attacks characterised by stabbings, shootings and vehicle rammings. We were concerned by the role of incitement, particularly on social media. For example, following a fatal shooting in East Jerusalem on 9 October, Fatah's official Facebook page called on Palestinians to go on strike "in memory of...this morning's martyr". We continued to urge the Palestinian Authority to condemn such attacks.

There were 51 Palestinian deaths caused by Israeli security forces between 1 July and 31 December and 975 injuries between 1 July and 31 October. The UK continued to have concerns at reports of Israeli security forces using excessive force and we have called for thorough investigations.

The Israeli authorities responded to violence with a number of measures, some of which have violated the human rights of Palestinians. In early July, Israeli forces blocked several junctions in Hebron, affecting access to services and livelihoods. In Bani Na'im, the Israeli authorities revoked the permits of an estimated 2,800 workers to enter Israel. Israel continued to carry out punitive demolitions; during the reporting period the Israeli army punitively demolished 10 homes belonging to families of Palestinians suspected of perpetrating or assisting the perpetration of attacks against Israelis.

Israel continued to make extensive use of administrative detention. On 8 December, the EU Missions in Jerusalem and Ramallah released a statement expressing concern about 700 Palestinian administrative detainees. The detention of circus trainer Mohammed Abu Sakha without charge for over a year remained particularly alarming.

Several human rights organisations reported attacks and threats made against their staff by Israeli forces. Similarly we were concerned by a number of indictments levelled against human rights defenders such as in the case of the activist Issa Amro.

The Israeli Prison Service reported that there were 350 Palestinian child detainees in Israeli prisons at the end of August, including 10 in administrative detention. The UK continued to express concern about the treatment of Palestinian minors in Israeli military detention. We were particularly concerned by reports of the heavy use of painful restraints and the high number of Palestinian minors who were not informed of their legal rights. Despite the decrease in the number of incidents of settler violence, we remain concerned that incidents in the period to 26 December caused 12 casualties and 36 cases of property damage against Palestinians. We continued to call upon the Israeli authorities to enhance law enforcement, investigations, accountability and deterrence.

The reporting period saw an increase in expansion of illegal Israeli settlements. The UK continued to condemn Israel's systematic policy of settlement expansion, which undermines the viability of the 2-state solution. On 27 July and 8 December, Minister for the Middle East Mr Ellwood expressed concern at the progress of plans for 770 settlement units between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. In addition, Mr Ellwood released a series of statements condemning settlement expansion in East Jerusalem: on 28 July, on the issuing of tenders for 323 units; on 3 November, on approval of permits for the construction of 181 homes in Gilo; on 16 November, on the revival of plans for constructing 500 new units in Ramat Shlomo. The UK voted in favour of UN Security Council Resolution 2334, which called on Israel immediately to cease settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

On 8 December, Mr Ellwood expressed his concern about the introduction of the Land Regularisation Bill to the Israeli Knesset, which seeks to 'legalise' settlement outposts considered illegal even under Israeli law. This called into question the Israeli government's commitment to a 2-state solution.

The high number of demolitions of Palestinian structures in Area C continued. In one incident, 5 homes were demolished in Um al-Kheir community in South Hebron Hills, leaving 27 people, including 16 minors, homeless. 314 structures were demolished in Area C, between 1 July and 31 December, resulting in the displacement of 384 people. 46 herding communities, such as Susiya, still faced heightened threat of mass demolitions and forcible transfer. Palestinians continued to be routinely denied building permits for Area C.

In East Jerusalem, the pace of demolitions increased markedly, with the total number during the reporting period reaching 94. The largest incident involved the demolition of 11 homes in Qalandia village, displacing 6 people and affecting 179.

In the lead up to Fatah's seventh congress, Palestinian Authority security services targeted the opposition by detaining loyalists of Mohammed Dahlan. We were concerned by the use of force against protesters during a peaceful assembly in Jenin in September.

We remain concerned by the treatment of detainees held by the Palestinian Authority. In August, a detainee in Nablus was beaten to death in custody by the Palestinian security forces. On 26 August, the EU Missions in Jerusalem and Ramallah released a statement expressing grave concern over this incident.

On 12 November, President Abbas lifted the parliamentary immunity of 5 Palestinian lawmakers. According to the NGO Al-Haq, President Abbas's decision undermined the independence of the judiciary, constituted a violation of the rule of law and the principle of the separation of powers.

Local elections were scheduled to be held across the West Bank and Gaza on 8 October but were postponed. We continued to urge all sides to make efforts to hold genuine and democratic local elections in the West Bank and Gaza. The conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is deeply complex. The government believes that negotiations will only succeed when they are conducted between the 2 parties, supported by the international community.

2. Gaza

The security situation in Gaza remained tense. We remain deeply concerned that Hamas and other militants are re-arming, re-building tunnels and holding training camps. Militants continued to test fire rockets into the sea. From July until the end of November, there were 4 rocket attacks from militants in Gaza into Israel. Israel responded with strikes into Gaza. The IDF carried out 21 incursions along Gazan border areas.

The Hamas authorities continued to issue death sentences without the ratification of the Palestinian President and have issued 7 since July. On 19 August and 7 October, Mr Ellwood released statements to condemn the issuing of death sentences.

We continue to have concerns over restrictions on freedom of expression, particularly over the interruption of civil and political assembly. In October, the de facto Gazan authorities prevented a conference on Palestinian reconciliation.

Gaza's fishing industry continued to suffer as a consequence of Israeli-imposed restrictions. In November, the Israeli authorities pledged to temporarily extend the fishing limit from 6 to 9 nautical miles. The UK regrets that this was not implemented. The UK has consistently called for fishing limits to be extended to 20 miles, as stated in the Oslo Accords. According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights the Israeli security forces arrested 50 fishermen, wounded 7 and confiscated 15 fishing boats during the reporting period.

The UK continued to support the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) but we are concerned by slow progress particularly in rebuilding homes. Of the 100,000 Palestinians whose homes were destroyed or severely damaged in the 2014 conflict, 65,000 remain displaced. As of 31 July, only 46% of pledges to reconstruction of Gaza had been disbursed.

The UK remains concerned by restrictions on the movement of people and goods to/from Gaza. During the reporting period, there was a significant drop in the number of Israeli exit permits issued to Gazans.

Between July and December, the Rafah Crossing Point with Egypt remained closed, except for 28 days. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, only 164 truckloads a month left Gaza via Israel, a fraction of 2007 levels. The number of truckloads entering Gaza via Israel increased to an average of 10,081 truckloads a month, far short of the 15,301 in 2007.

3. Israel

We were concerned by a demolition order issued against the Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran in the Negev. The demolition did not take place but the threat of demolition remains. On 23 November, Mr Ellwood released a statement calling upon the Israeli authorities and Bedouin community to work together to find a solution, including the creation of a robust planning process adequately addressing the needs of Israel's Bedouin communities.

In July, the Knesset passed an NGO Bill, increasing the transparency requirements for NGOs which receive the majority of their funding from foreign governments. While many of the bill's stipulations were watered down, it predominantly affects human rights NGOs.