



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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Israel is a multiparty parliamentary democracy. Although it has no constitution, the parliament, the unicameral 120-member Knesset, has enacted a series of "Basic Laws" that enumerate fundamental rights. Certain fundamental laws, orders, and regulations legally depend on the existence of a "state of emergency," which has been in effect since 1948. Under the Basic Laws, the Knesset has the power to dissolve the government and mandate elections. The nationwide Knesset elections in March, considered free and fair, resulted in a coalition government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security services. (An annex to this report covers human rights in the occupied territories. This report deals with human rights in Israel and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.)

During the year according to Israeli Security Agency (ISA, also known as Shabak) statistics, Palestinians committed 47 terror attacks (including stabbings, assaults, shootings, projectile and rocket attacks, and attacks by improvised explosive devices (IED) within the Green Line that led to the deaths of five Israelis and one Eritrean, and two stabbing terror attacks committed by Jewish Israelis within the Green Line and not including Jerusalem. According to the ISA, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other militant groups fired 22 rockets into Israel and in 11 other incidents either planted IEDs or carried out shooting or projectile attacks into Israel and the Golan Heights. Further information on the human rights situation in the occupied territories is in the annex.

The most significant human rights problems were terrorist attacks targeting civilians and politically and religiously motivated societal violence; institutional and societal discrimination against Arab citizens of Israel, many of whom self-identify as Palestinian, including the Bedouin, in particular in access to equal education and employment opportunities; institutional and societal discrimination against Ethiopian Israelis and women; and the treatment of refugees, asylum seekers, and irregular migrants.

Other human rights problems included institutional and societal discrimination against non-Orthodox Jews and intermarried families and labor rights abuses against foreign workers.

The government took some steps to prosecute and punish officials who committed abuses within Israel regardless of rank or seniority. The government proceeded with structural reforms to reduce impunity and increase accountability.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

On January 14, police responding to an incident in Rahat involving illegal drugs shot and killed bystander Sami al-Jaar. On January 18, demonstrations during Jaar's funeral turned into clashes with police. In the course of responding, police used tear gas; protester Sami Ziadneh died following inhalation of the gas. Authorities arrested a police officer in connection with Jaar's death and released him to house arrest following the incidents. In December the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) Department for Investigating Police Officers notified the family there was insufficient evidence to indict the officer and offered the family a copy of the investigation material.

On May 5, the MOJ's Department for Investigating Police Officers closed its investigation into the November 2014 killing of Israeli citizen Kheir al-Din Hamdan in Kafr Kana and announced it would not charge any police officers involved in the shooting. Police had stated Hamdan tried to stab an officer during an attempt to arrest Hamdan, but video footage of the event raised questions as to whether police followed proper rules of engagement. The Department for Investigating police Officers concluded the shooting was an act of self-defense; according to the conclusions of its investigation, the deceased approached police officers wielding a knife and endangered the lives of the officers. The police officers attempted to warn and deter the deceased before opening fire, according to the investigation.

On July 30, an ultra-Orthodox Haredi man, Yishai Schlissel, attacked participants at the Jerusalem March for Pride and Tolerance in West Jerusalem, killing 16-year-old Shira Banki and injuring five others. Authorities had released Schlissel from prison weeks earlier after he completed a 10-year prison sentence for attacking a previous gay pride march. On August 23, authorities indicted him for one count of murder and six counts of attempted murder.

The number of terrorist attacks by armed individuals increased during the year, while attacks by rocket and mortar fire decreased. According to the ISA, militant groups launched 22 rockets from the Gaza strip and one rocket from the Sinai. There were 11 other shooting, projectile, and IED attacks from Gaza. According to the government, on January 28, Hezbollah anti-tank fire killed two Israeli soldiers in the Har Dov area along the Lebanese border.

In a wave of violence in October and November, attackers killed three Israelis and one Eritrean national and injured dozens within the Green Line as of November 23. Individual Palestinian attackers targeted civilians in Israel in stabbing and car-ramming attacks in areas including Ra'anana, Beit Shemesh, Tel Aviv, Netanya, Rishon Le-Tzion, Kiryat Gat, Petach Tikva, and West Jerusalem.

For example, on November 19, a Palestinian man who had a legal permit to work in Israel killed two Israelis and injured another in a stabbing attack in southern Tel Aviv. The incident took place in part in an improvised synagogue where some of the victims were praying. Authorities apprehended the attacker. Authorities indicted him in December, and criminal proceedings against him were underway at year's end. There were also two attacks by Arab citizens of Israel against Jewish Israelis. In one of these cases, on October 19, Mohanad al-Okabi, a resident of an unrecognized Bedouin village, stabbed and killed a soldier at Beer Sheva's central bus station. Al-Okabi injured 10 other Israelis with the soldier's firearm before security services shot and killed him. During the incident security forces mistakenly shot an Eritrean resident of Israel; onlookers then attacked him, and he died of his injuries. Minister of the Interior Silvan Shalom announced he would seek the attorney general's concurrence to revoke the citizenship of those who carried out such attacks in accordance with a provision of the citizenship law that allows such a move in the case of "breaches of allegiance."

On November 30, the Jerusalem District Court convicted two Israeli Jewish minors of the July 2014 kidnapping and killing of Mohammad Abu Khdeir. The court found a third accused person, Yosef Ben David, to have committed the killing, but his conviction was pending the court's decision on whether to consider a psychiatric evaluation submitted days before the court was planned to deliver the verdict. Final determination of Ben David's culpability and sentencing was pending at year's end. Ben David and the two minors found to have killed Abu Khdeir confessed to the killing and said that revenge for the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank in June 2014 partially motivated their actions. The government recognized all four killing victims as victims of terror.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The law does not refer to a specific crime of torture but prohibits acts such as assault and pressure by a public official. In 1999 the Supreme Court ruled that although torture and the application of physical or psychological pain were illegal, ISA interrogators might be exempt from criminal prosecution if they used such methods in extraordinary cases determined to involve an imminent threat, the "ticking bomb" scenario. Human rights organizations alleged that interrogation methods permitted by law and actually used by security personnel included beatings and forcing an individual to hold a stress position for long periods, while the government insisted it did not use any interrogation methods prohibited by the UN Convention against Torture. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to criticize other alleged detention practices they termed abusive, including isolation, sleep deprivation, and psychological abuse such as threats to interrogate family members or demolish family homes. Authorities continued to state the ISA held detainees in isolation only in extreme cases and when there was no alternative option and that it did not use isolation as a means of augmenting interrogation, forcing a confession, or as punishment. The government rejected claims that interrogations of minors breached the convention. An independent Inspector for Complaints Against ISA Interrogators in the Ministry of Justice handled complaints of misconduct and abuse in interrogations. An extended temporary law exempts the General Security Services from audio and video recording of interrogations of "security suspects." The NGO Adalah

urged the government to reject extension of this law, emphasizing the recordings could prevent torture and mistreatment of Palestinian detainees.

The Ministry of Justice's Interrogee Complaints Comptroller took the testimony of detainees whom authorities had interrogated, then instituted a reform that allows representatives of the Public Committee against Torture in Israel (PCATI) to be present in meetings between complainants and the comptroller. The government stated that by year's end it had resolved the majority of cases filed through 2013, and added that it handled the "overwhelming majority" of cases in less than one year. The State Comptroller's Office also reviewed ISA interrogations.

The government established the Turkel Commission to implement the findings of the 2010 report of the Public Commission to Examine the Maritime Incident – the interception and capture by the Israeli Navy of ships carrying humanitarian aid bound for Gaza. Following the publication of the Turkel Commission's Second Report in 2013, which examined the country's mechanisms for investigating alleged violations of the laws of war, the government in January 2014 established a team of professionals led by Joseph Ciechanover to recommend practical steps to implement the recommendations of that report.

The Ciechanover report, released in September, found that overall the country's internal mechanisms for investigating and prosecuting alleged war crimes – many initiated following and in response to the Turkel Commission report – were sufficient and unbiased. These included the Fact-Finding Mechanism first used in investigations of Operation Protective Edge, a new complaint mechanism within the Ministry of Justice for allegations of torture, a new operational standing order expanding the reporting duties of military personnel regarding incidents that occur during operational activity, changes to the appointment processes of the military advocate general and the military prosecutor, the formulation of a new directive setting timeframes for deciding on whether to open a criminal investigation, and the relocation of the position of the Interrogee Complaints Comptroller. Additionally, the Ciechanover report recommended increasing and clarifying civilian oversight (via the attorney general) of the military justice system, a reform the government stated it was implementing as of the end of the year.

The civil society group Yesh Din raised concerns that the Turkel and Ciechanover Commissions had created an impression, for the sake of the country's international reputation, that the investigation and examination mechanism was improving, while the actual reforms implemented fell short of that goal. In particular, Yesh Din criticized the Ciechanover Commission for deferring a decision to impose responsibility on military commanders and civilian superiors for offenses committed by their subordinates. The Ciechanover Commission opted instead to recommend that: "[T]he question of the explicit anchoring of the responsibility of military commanders and civilian superiors in Israeli law would continue to be examined by the relevant parties before being decided."

In April social media users circulated a CCTV video showing two police officers in Holon stopping and beating a uniformed Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldier of Ethiopian descent, Demas Fekadeh. On May 4, Police Chief Danino said that he would fire one officer and bar the other, a volunteer, from further service. A month later the attorney general closed criminal investigations against one of the police officers and against Fekadeh. The state prosecutor and Ministry of Justice investigators determined Fekadeh had initiated the clash with the police officers, who had acted within their

authority. Police stated they did not intend to reinstate the officer (see section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

In July, Shin Bet denied that it used violence and threats in questioning the suspects in the June arson of the Church of the Multiplication (also known as the Church of the Loaves and Fishes). The suspects' lawyers alleged that authorities abused and humiliated the arson suspects, including questioning one of them without justification on the Sabbath, although he was religious.

In December the Supreme Court rejected an appeal by prisoners under questioning for alleged involvement in a terror attack in Duma, the West Bank, in July. The prisoners' lawyer had claimed the ISA prevented the prisoners from meeting with a lawyer and alleged ISA interrogators used illegal methods against the prisoners, including physical force and sleep deprivation. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel called on the Ministry of Justice to investigate the allegations.

On November 18, the Jerusalem magistrate's court convicted a police officer in the case of the assault on Tariq Khdeir in July 2014. The court sentenced the police officer to 45 days of community service and four months' imprisonment (suspended for a period of two years). Neither the government nor the defense appealed the sentence.

The government had still not concluded an investigation into the death of Palestinian prisoner Arafat Jaradat, who died in custody at Megiddo Prison in 2013. Autopsy results assessed by Israeli, Palestinian, and Turkish experts (the family independently requested a Turkish expert review) arrived at conflicting conclusions on whether Jaradat died due to natural causes or from actions by security forces. The Central District Prosecution reiterated the findings of the Israeli forensic expert that there was no basis for the claim Jaradat had been tortured.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

The law provides prisoners and detainees the right to conditions that do not harm their health or dignity. Conditions in permanent detention facilities run by the Israel Prison Service (IPS) generally met international standards, according to the International Commission of the Red Cross (ICRC), but in Saharonim Prison and to some extent Holot Detention Center, the ICRC indicated that migrants in administrative detention (holding suspected criminals indefinitely without presenting charges or going to trial) should be subject to a less restrictive regime. African migrants and asylum seekers detained in Holot complained of severe cold in winter, heat in summer, and poor food quality – claims documented in a July 8 report by the NGO Hotline for Refugees and Migrants. Since March 2014 NGOs have had access to Holot. The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants reported it could access Saharonim by providing authorities with the name and prison identification number of the detainee who had requested their assistance, but it could not move about and engage with individuals in the facility freely. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported it could regularly access Saharonim, Givon, and Holot detention facilities by submitting a request in advance. The ICRC reported that the IPS granted it access to protected persons, including migrants in detention. In an April letter, NGOs Adalah and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel claimed that the IPS violated its commitment to improve conditions of transport of Palestinian "security prisoners" to court and medical appointments. They alleged IPS failed to provide food, water, or access to restroom facilities during transport and artificially extended the time of transfer.

Physical Conditions: As of November 15, according to the government, there were 21,072 prisoners in IPS facilities in Israel and the occupied territories, including 570 minors. Of the total prisoner population, 6,828 were Palestinian, with 5,380 of these characterized as security prisoners or detainees from the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza (including 264 Palestinian minors). These prisoners often faced harsher conditions than those of the general prison population, including increased incidence of administrative detention, restricted family visits, ineligibility for temporary furloughs, and solitary confinement.

In August the Knesset passed a law authorizing force-feeding of hunger striking prisoners under specific conditions; however, the Israel Medical Association declared the legislation unethical, and urged doctors to refuse to implement it. Security prisoners organized several hunger strikes during the year to protest prison conditions and demand the government end administrative detention. In Nafha prison 120 prisoners went on hunger strike from August 5 to 10. Palestinian detainee Khaled Adnan went on a hunger strike for 56 days to protest his yearlong administrative detention. Officials agreed not to renew his administrative detention for an additional six months and released him on July 11. Palestinian administrative detainee Mohammad Allan went on a hunger strike for 66 days, during which authorities transferred him to two hospitals due to deteriorating health. On August 20, the Supreme Court stayed his administrative detention after MRI scans showed Allan had suffered brain damage and ruled he should remain hospitalized as a regular patient, at which point Allan renounced his hunger strike. Allan remained in an Israeli hospital until September 16. Upon his release from hospital, security forces immediately rearrested him and returned him to administrative detention.

There were no deaths in prisons and detention centers.

NGOs reported lack of access to legal and social services in detention centers for irregular migrants. Social workers provided individual social and supportive treatment, with emphasis on identifying and providing services for trafficking victims, victims of abuse, and victims of sexual violations.

Administration: While authorities generally allowed visits from lawyers and stated that every inmate who requested to meet with an attorney was able to do so this is not always the case. NGOs alleged authorities did not allow Palestinian detainees, including minors, access to a lawyer during their initial arrest. Travel restrictions on entry into the country affected the access of lawyers and other visitors to some Palestinian prisoners.

The law allows prisoners to submit a petition to judicial authorities alleging substandard prison conditions, and the government stated that authorities investigated credible allegations of inhuman conditions, documented such investigations, and released the results publicly, although the ICRC was not aware of instances when the government released the results of such investigations. The state comptroller serves as ombudsman and investigates public complaints against government institutions, including the IPS.

Independent Monitoring: The ICRC regularly monitored IPS facilities, including Holot and Saharonim, for irregular migrants and the two IDF provisional detention centers. The ICRC monitors all facilities in accordance with its standard modalities, except for urgent or isolated cases raised bilaterally with the concerned authorities (that is, relating to the composition of the visiting team and the conditions for interviews without witnesses). PCATI continued to press for structural reforms, including mandatory video recordings of interrogations. The Public Defenders' Office is

officially responsible for monitoring and reporting on prison conditions, and it did so during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions for all citizens. Authorities subjected non-Israeli residents of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights to the same laws as Israeli citizens. Noncitizens of Palestinian origin detained on security grounds fell under military jurisdiction even if detained in Israel (see annex). With regard to irregular migrants, the most recent amendment to the Prevention of Infiltration Law, passed in December 2014, allows the government to detain migrants and asylum seekers who arrived after December 2014 for three months in the Saharonim Prison facility "for the purpose of identification and to explore options for relocation of the individual." The government may then hold them for 12 months in Holot, a remote, semi-open facility run by the IPS. Authorities close Holot from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. and require a daily check-in (see section 2.d.).

Due to an August 11 ruling by the Supreme Court, on August 24 and 25, the government released 1,178 Eritrean and Sudanese migrants from the Holot facility; authorities had held all of them for more than a year without charging them with any offenses. The government barred those freed from Holot from living or working in either Tel Aviv or Eilat, where they would have supportive communities and access to the limited medical facilities and other social services available to the migrant population.

The most recent amendment to the Prevention of Infiltration Law also allows authorities to send those who fail to renew their visas on time to Holot for up to 120 days, but authorities provided most renewal services in Tel Aviv. According to UNHCR the government has begun summoning migrants/asylum seekers who approach a Ministry of Interior office to renew their visa on time to a hearing to determine if they should be detained. If the hearing results in their being assigned to Holot, the individual is provided with two weeks to organize his affairs prior to reporting to Holot. The law prohibits detention based on certain factors including age, health, gender, or other protected status. Authorities can send those who violated rules at Holot to Saharonim Prison. The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants reported that authorities have sent more than half of Holot detainees to Saharonim for up to several months for various infractions.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Under the authority of the prime minister, the ISA combats terrorism and espionage in the country and the occupied territories. The national police, including the border police and the immigration police, are under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Security. The IDF is responsible for external security and has no jurisdiction over citizens. ISA forces operating in the occupied territories fall under the IDF for operations and operational debriefing. The Ciechanover report (see section 1.c.) clarified that the Ministry of Justice and its investigators and the IDF and its investigators would divide investigative and prosecutorial responsibilities in incidents in which police were operating under the authority of the military. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the ISA and police forces, and the government has effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. The government took steps to investigate allegations of the use of excessive force by police and military. NGOs continued to criticize the low number of indictments

issued relative to the number of investigations opened and the high percentage of cases closed due to investigation failures by military police.

The Department for Investigation of Police Officers in the Ministry of Justice is responsible for investigating complaints against ISA bodies, including incidents involving the police and the border police occurring on Israeli territory and Jerusalem and incidents taking place in the occupied territories that do not involve the use of a weapon.

Investigative responsibility for alleged abuses by the IDF, including incidents involving a weapon in which police units were operating under IDF authority in the occupied territories, remain with the Ministry of Defense in the Military Police Criminal Investigations Department.

Human rights NGOs continued to state that existing accountability mechanisms precluded serious internal investigations by the military and were marred by severe structural flaws that rendered them incapable of conducting professional investigations.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Legally, police must have warrants based on sufficient evidence and issued by an authorized official to arrest a suspect. Authorities generally informed such persons promptly of charges against them, with the exception of administrative detainees. The law allows authorities to detain suspects without charge for 24 hours before bringing them before a judge, with limited exceptions allowing for up to 48 hours. Authorities generally respected these rights for persons arrested in the country. There was a functioning bail system, and detainees could appeal decisions denying bail, with the exception of administrative detainees. Authorities allowed detainees to consult with an attorney in a timely manner, including one provided by the government for the indigent, and to contact family members promptly, with the exception of administrative detainees.

According to the circumstances of each case, such as the severity of the alleged offense, status as a minor, risk of escape, or other factors, authorities either granted or denied bail to noncitizens of Palestinian origin detained for security violations. Authorities held most Palestinian minors (under age 18) arrested in the West Bank and Gaza in prisons in Israel but prosecuted them under the Israeli military law applicable to the occupied territories, which denies many of the rights Israeli law would grant them. Authorities may prosecute persons detained on security grounds criminally or hold them as administrative detainees or illegal combatants, according to one of three legal regimes.

First, under a temporary law on criminal procedures, repeatedly renewed since 2006, the IPS may hold persons suspected of a security offense for 48 hours prior to bringing them before a judge, with limited exceptions allowing the IPS to detain a suspect for up to 96 hours before bringing the suspect before the senior judge of a district court. In security-related cases, authorities may hold a person for up to 35 days without an indictment (versus 30 days for other than security-related cases), and the law allows the court to lengthen the holding of a detainee on security grounds for an initial period of up to 20 days for interrogation without an indictment (versus 15 days for other than security-related cases). Authorities may deny security detainees access to an attorney for up to 21 days.

Second, the Emergency Powers Law allows the Ministry of Defense to detain persons administratively without charge for up to six months, renewable indefinitely. Authorities used administrative detention as an exception when they could not present intelligence sources as evidence for criminal proceedings. Following several arson attacks in Israel and the West Bank during the summer – one of which led to the deaths of three members of the Palestinian Dawabshe family in Duma and another that damaged the Church of the Multiplication in Tabgha – the government announced it would expand administrative detention to Jewish extremists suspected of terrorist activity. Laws allow the government to detain Israeli citizens administratively, but authorities usually exercised this option only for Palestinians. An administrative detainee has the right to appeal any decision to lengthen detention to a military court of appeals and then to the Supreme Court, and detainees routinely did so. The military courts may rely on classified evidence denied to detainees and their lawyers when determining whether to prolong administrative detention. There is no system whereby authorities may clear a defense team member to view classified information used to justify holding an administrative detainee. According to B'Tselem, at year's end there were 584 administrative detainees in IPS detention centers, a decrease over the previous year, including three women and six minors. The NGO Honenu alleged there were four additional Jewish administrative detainees. Civil society organizations continued to criticize administrative detention as undemocratic.

Third, the Illegal Combatant Law permits authorities to hold a detainee for 14 days before review by a district court judge, deny access to counsel for up to 21 days with the attorney general's approval, and allow indefinite detention subject to twice-yearly district court reviews and appeals to the Supreme Court.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were no credible reports of arbitrary or false arrests, although some detained Jewish youths, alleged to belong to extremist organizations, questioned the validity of their arrest and use of administrative detention, house arrest, and administrative orders banning them from certain areas of the West Bank.

Pretrial Detention: Administrative detention continued to result in lengthy pretrial detention for security detainees who were mostly Palestinian; some, however, were Jewish Israelis or Arab Israelis. Authorities held most detainees for less than one year but held some for more than one year and a small number for more than two years.

Protracted Detention of Rejected Asylum Seekers or Stateless Persons: The Prevention of Infiltration Law defines all irregular border crossers as "infiltrators" and permits authorities to detain irregular migrants, including asylum seekers and their children.

In September 2014 the Supreme Court struck down the section of the Prevention of Infiltration Law that allowed irregular migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, to be detained in the Holot open facility indefinitely. In December 2014 the Knesset passed a third amendment to the Prevention of Infiltration Law, which limited the time in Holot to 20 months. On August 11, the Supreme Court rejected this aspect of the law. The court gave the government six months to determine a more acceptable limit on the time authorities could hold an individual in Holot and temporarily set the limit at one year. This resulted in the release of 1,178 asylum seekers from Holot. The government may still hold irregular migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, in Saharonim Prison for three months on arrival and then move them to Holot for 12 months. The

Supreme Court's ruling affirmed the use of the Holot facility to house irregular migrants, albeit for a limited period.

Under the Law of Entry, the Ministry of Interior and police developed an outline of cooperation that allows for detention of irregular migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers living in the community and suspected of criminal activity, based on an administrative order rather than through the legal process.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence. (The annex covers military court trials of Palestinians and others in the occupied territories.)

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Defendants enjoy the rights to a presumption of innocence, to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them, to a fair trial without undue delay, and to adequate time and facilities to prepare their defense. They may not be compelled to testify or confess guilt, and may consult with an attorney, or if indigent, have one provided at public expense. Trials are public except when a court determines a closed trial is required to protect state security, foreign relations, a party's or witness's right to privacy, or a victim of a sexual offense. There are no trials by jury. Defendants have the right to confront witnesses against them, to present witnesses and evidence on their behalf, to access evidence held against them, and to appeal to the Supreme Court. The government/prosecution is under a general obligation following an indictment to provide all evidence to the defense. The government may on security grounds withhold from defense lawyers evidence it gathered but will not use in its case against the accused. The Supreme Court in civilian courts or the Court of Appeals in military courts can scrutinize the decision to withhold such evidence. The rules of evidence in cases of espionage tried in criminal court do not differ from the normal rules of evidence – no use of secret evidence is permissible.

The Ministry of Justice determined the law allows the courts to consider secret evidence in reviewing the cases of Palestinians who were convicted in civilian courts and granted conditional release from prison as part of a prisoner exchange and later re-arrested for violating the terms of their release, because this parole board review is considered procedural. The government formed a special IDF judicial commission in 2014 to handle cases of Palestinians who violated the conditions of their pardons in the 2011 prisoner exchange for soldier Gilad Shalit. In December 2014 the commission resented Palestinians Muhammad Tzalah and Abd Taami to life terms and resented Imad Musa to 24 years and eight months. On August 3, a Nazareth court rejected the petition of an additional Palestinian prisoner, Vahiv Ali Abu Roub, who challenged the IDF commission's decision to return him to prison to serve the remaining 23 years of a murder sentence. Roub alleged the government had unfairly targeted him and other Palestinians pardoned in the Shalit prisoner exchange for arrest in Operation Brother's Keeper of 2014. In rejecting his petition, the court cited ISA evidence showing that he took an active part in contributing to the terrorism threat in the West Bank.

Security or military trials are open to the public, but, since authorities conduct them in a military camp, members of the public require an entry permit from the military. Authorities conducted certain trials in a closed setting, not open to the public, for reasons of security or for the protection of the identity of a minor.

Military courts provide some of the procedural rights granted in civilian criminal courts, although their rates of conviction of Palestinians charged with various crimes are much higher – at nearly 90 percent, according to Yesh Din. The evidentiary rules governing trials of Palestinians, and others subject to military law in the occupied territories, are the same as evidentiary rules in criminal cases. According to the Ministry of Justice, the law does not permit convictions based solely on confessions. The government stated that the evidentiary rules applied in military trials were the same as those applied in civilian courts and did not allow presentation of secret evidence not provided to the defendant or their counsel. Counsel may assist the accused in such trials, and a judge may assign counsel to defendants. Indigent detainees do not automatically receive free legal counsel for military trials, but almost all detainees had counsel, even in minor cases. Court indictments were read in Hebrew and, unless the defendant waived this right, in Arabic. Authorities translated all military court indictments into Arabic. At least one interpreter was present for simultaneous interpretation in every military court hearing, unless the defendant waived that right. Defendants may appeal through the Military Court of Appeals and then to the Supreme Court.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of civilian political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

An independent and impartial judiciary adjudicates lawsuits seeking damages for, or cessation of, human rights violations. Administrative remedies exist, and court orders usually were enforced. Legally, Palestinians may file suit to obtain compensation through civil suits in some cases, even when a criminal suit is unsuccessful and the actions against them are considered legal.

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

The law prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected those prohibitions. Separate religious court systems adjudicate matters such as marriage and divorce for the Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Druze communities. Each year an estimated 20,000 civil marriages, marriages of some non-Orthodox Jews, marriages in non-Orthodox ceremonies, marriages of a Jew to a non-Jew, or marriages of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim must take place outside the country to be considered legal, because religious courts refuse to accept these marriages, and the country lacks a civil marriage law. Many Jewish citizens objected to exclusive Orthodox control over aspects of their personal lives. For example, the Orthodox Rabbinate did not consider to be Jewish approximately 322,000 citizens who considered themselves Jewish and who immigrated either as Jews or as family members of Jews; therefore, they may not be married or buried in Jewish cemeteries in the country. The Orthodox Rabbinate had the authority to handle divorces of any Jewish couple regardless of how they were married, and the divorce of any couple wherein one spouse considers him or herself to be Jewish. The government stated that 24 cemeteries in the country served immigrants not considered Jewish by the Orthodox Rabbinate. The estimated 15,000 Messianic Jews, who believe Jesus is the Messiah and consider themselves Jews, also experienced

these infringements on their personal lives, since the Orthodox Rabbinate regards them as Jewish apostates. Authorities did not fully implement a law requiring the government to establish civil cemeteries.

The Law of Citizenship and Entry, which is valid through April and renewed annually, prohibits Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza, including those who are spouses of Israeli residents or citizens, from obtaining resident status in Jerusalem or Israel unless the Ministry of Interior makes a special determination, usually on humanitarian grounds. The law allows the entry of spouses of Israelis on a "staying permit" if the male spouse is age 35 or older and the female spouse is age 25 or older. Authorities required East Jerusalem residents who relocated to forfeit their Jerusalem identification cards. The government may revoke the Jerusalem identification cards of those who have been away from Jerusalem for seven years, and the government may seek to revoke a Palestinian's Jerusalem identification card if the person obtains citizenship or residency in another country. The only way to qualify for Jerusalem residency and an identification card is to derive it from one's parents or through a spouse. There is no immigration process, and one usually may not regain Jerusalem residency if authorities revoke it. (The revocation of identity cards for Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem is addressed in more detail in the annex.)

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law generally provides for freedom of speech, including for members of the press, and the government generally respected these rights. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of speech and of the press.

The law, however, criminalizes calling persons "Nazis" or "fascists." In October a Tel Aviv court fined a social activist 22,500 new Israeli shekels (NIS) (\$5,770), including legal fees, for having committed slander by calling a government employee "Eichmann" and "murderer" in public. The law imposes tort liability on any person who knowingly issues a public call for an economic, cultural, or academic boycott of the State of Israel and the Israeli-controlled occupied territories. Plaintiffs must prove direct economic harm to claim damages under the "anti-boycott" legislation. The law also permits the minister of finance to institute regulations imposing administrative sanctions on those calling for such a boycott, including restrictions on participating in tenders for contracts with the government and denial of government benefits.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: The law prohibits hate speech and content liable to incite to violence or discrimination on grounds of race, origin, religion, nationality, and gender, and the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance prohibits expressing support for illegal or terrorist organizations. On April 15, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of a law giving to a private party the right to seek damages against individuals or entities calling for a boycott of Israel or Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

In cases of speech that constitutes incitement to violence or "hate speech," the law empowers police to limit freedom of expression. Police arrested Bentzi Gopstein, leader of the antiassimilationist organization Lehava, for stating in a panel discussion with religious students in Jerusalem that he

condoned attacks on non-Jewish religious sites, including the June 18 burning of the Church of the Multiplication in Tabgha. A local court sentenced two men to suspended sentences and small fines for inciting to violence against Arab students in Tzfat.

In June, Minister of Education Naftali Bennett removed the play *A Parallel Time* from the list of approved cultural performances for students. The play was based on the story of a Palestinian prisoner convicted of killing an Israeli citizen. Minister of Culture Miri Regev froze the funding of Al-Midan Theater in Haifa, which first sponsored the play. In June, Regev also stated she would seek to halt government funding of Al-Mina bilingual children's theater in Jaffa, following press attention surrounding the decision of actor Norman Issa, Al-Mina's director, not to perform in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. As of October the government has neither restricted funding of Al-Mina, nor has Issa altered his pledge not to perform across the Green Line. The attorney general issued an opinion that the minister of culture cannot make funding of cultural institutions contingent on compliance with partisan political views. Three cities cancelled screenings of the Dutch documentary film *Shivering in Gaza* or required Amnesty International (AI), which was screening the film, to shift locations due to public protest about its content; screenings took place in other areas including Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Yeruham.

Press and Media Freedoms: The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction. On September 3, the Knesset amended the public broadcasting law to prohibit journalists on public broadcasting from airing their own views. Subsequently, the Israel Press Council urged the government to cancel the law, saying it violated free speech, and on September 14, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced he would work to cancel this clause, which he initially supported; further action was pending at year's end.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: All media organizations must submit to military censors any material relating to specific military issues or strategic infrastructure issues, such as oil and water supplies. Organizations may appeal the censor's decisions to the Supreme Court, and the censor may not appeal a court judgment.

News printed or broadcast abroad is subject to security censorship. The government did not fine newspapers or other mass media for violating censorship regulations during the year. The government regularly enacted restrictive orders on sensitive security information and required foreign correspondents, as well as local media, to abide by these orders. For example, until July the government imposed a comprehensive order prohibiting media outlets from publicizing information on the abduction and detention of two Israeli citizens in Gaza.

Libel/Slander Laws: There were no reports of authorities using laws against slander or libel to restrict public discussion.

National Security: The government used emergency law to outlaw the Northern Islamic Movement, stating that they incited to violence and alleging that it closely collaborated with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. Knesset Member Ahmed Tibi and other Arab Israeli politicians stated, however, that politics appears to have motivated this decision much more than a threat to national security. The government issued cease and desist orders to 17 related organizations.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the internet. The government monitored e-mail and internet chat rooms for security purposes. Internet access was widely available, and approximately 70 percent of the country's inhabitants used it regularly.

On February 25, authorities arrested Sidqi Maqt, a Syrian Druze from Majdal Shams in the Golan Heights, and charged him with espionage, assisting an enemy during wartime, and contact with a foreign agent due to Facebook posts by Maqt that documented Israeli military activity along the Israeli-Syrian border. According to media reporting, Maqt's indictment referenced his posts on his Facebook page as evidence, and it detailed the number of "likes" and "shares" his posts received, claiming that such posts "incited other Facebook users" to share "extremist sentiments" against the country.

On October 22, authorities indicted 19-year-old Anas Khatib from Shefa-Amr for incitement to violence and terrorism because of statements he had posted on his Facebook page, such as, "Jerusalem is Arab," "Long live the intifada," and "I am on the waiting list," the last allegedly implying a desire for martyrdom. On November 25, an Acre court released Khatib to house arrest and banned him from using the internet until authorities completed all legal proceedings against him.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The law prohibits institutions that receive government funding from engaging in commemoration of the Nakba, or "catastrophe," referring to the displacement of 80 percent of the Palestinian Arab population during Israel's 1948 War of Independence.

In March the Supreme Court accepted an appeal of a lower court ruling that permitted the president of Haifa University to impose restrictions on political activity on campus. The court expressed criticism of the university's policy of limiting public activities and required the university to amend its charter to be in line with principles of free speech.

In April the Supreme Court upheld an IPS policy prohibiting Palestinian prisoners designated as "security prisoners" and held in prisons from obtaining higher education through correspondence courses. The court ruled that the denial of higher education to "security prisoners" did not constitute unacceptable discrimination between security and criminal prisoners, as alleged in a petition by the legal advocacy NGO Adalah, because there were "fundamental differences" between these two prison populations. The court accepted the IPS allegation that terrorist organizations funded the security prisoners' studies as a reward for past offenses or incentive to continue acting against the state. Adalah stated the decision departed from the court's jurisprudence upholding a prisoner's rights except in cases where authorities require restrictions to maintain public order or prison security.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law provides for the freedoms of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights. Israeli and Palestinian NGOs, particularly those focused on human rights problems and critical of the government, asserted that the government sought to intimidate and stop their foreign funding (see section 5).

On April 30, in Jerusalem, and on May 3, in Tel Aviv, thousands of Ethiopian Israelis and their supporters gathered to protest police brutality and discrimination following the publication of a video showing police beating Ethiopian soldier Demas Fekadeh in the Tel Aviv suburb of Holon. The demonstrations at some points resulted in clashes with police. On April 30, demonstrators protesting racism and discrimination against the Ethiopian Israeli community blocked several major traffic arteries in Jerusalem before marching towards the prime minister's residence, where clashes occurred between participants and security forces. On May 3, approximately 7,500 demonstrators blocked one of the country's largest highways in both directions at evening rush hour, eventually moving their demonstration to Rabin Square in central Tel Aviv. While the protest was initially largely nonviolent, action by protesters and security forces resulted in violent clashes that lasted past midnight. Some accounts alleged demonstrators – some of whom may have been from outside groups – began pelting police with bottles and other projectiles and attempted to overturn police barricades; others alleged that officers became violent without provocation.

Participants and bystanders commented on widespread police use of sound grenades, skunk water, and water cannons; these crowd-control methods were rarely used within Green Line Israel. Bystanders alleged police also used tear gas against peaceful demonstrators, including former member of Knesset Pnina Tamato-Shata. One reporter wrote a personal account on social media alleging that police, contrary to their accounts, used unprecedented and excessive force. For their part, police contended their officers used "less than reasonable force" throughout the Tel Aviv demonstration. The demonstration resulted in 56 officers and 12 protesters injured; authorities arrested 43 persons.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) claimed that police acted contrary to their regulations when they failed to warn protesters prior to using crowd dispersal measures and that their use did not escalate gradually.

Police set up a committee to investigate the events. Government officials, including the president and prime minister, met with Fekadeh and Ethiopian community representatives in the wake of the demonstrations and pledged that police would conduct a thorough and transparent investigation. The government dropped charges against one of the police officers who apprehended Fekadeh and also against Fekadeh himself, concluding Fekadeh had not initiated the altercation.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's [*Report on International Religious Freedom*](#).

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

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government respected these rights for citizens.

UNHCR and NGOs expressed concern over the government's actions in providing protection and assistance to some refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern, including victims of trafficking, but not to others. UNHCR and NGOs raised specific concerns over the government's use of so-called voluntary return of detained migrants, including those seeking asylum, as well as the government's failure to provide independent individual refugee status determinations (RSD) for

the vast majority of migrants of sub-Saharan African origin, including Eritreans and Sudanese. UNHCR and NGOs also raised objections and called for changes to the government's continued use of "anti-infiltrator" laws, which impose long-term detention on all individuals who enter the country irregularly, including asylum seekers and their children. The amended Prevention of Infiltration Law gives authorities the discretion to detain these individuals for three months in prison followed by 20 months in an "open facility." On August 11, the Supreme Court issued a provisional ruling on the Law to Prevent Infiltration that temporarily reduced the maximum time that the government may detain migrants in Holot from 20 to 12 months and requires the government to legislate a more reasonable timeframe for detention within six months of the ruling.

The government reported the arrival of 168 irregular migrants through the end of the year, compared with 21 in 2014.

In mid-November the government reported that it was holding 243 detainees in Saharonim, 17 in Givon, and 1,277 in Holot. On December 29, the newspaper Haaretz reported that Holot was at capacity, housing 3,360 asylum seekers. An amendment to the Prevention of Infiltration Law, passed in 2014, excluded from summoning to Holot all women and children, men who could prove that they have a wife or children in Israel for whom they provide, recognized trafficking victims, persons over age 60, and those whose health could be negatively affected by detention in Holot. In April the government expanded the criteria for summons to Holot; according to UNHCR, torture survivors can now be sent to Holot. As of November 23, the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants was aware of 184 torture survivors that the government had summoned to Holot since the December 2014 amendment. With regard to Saharonim Prison, the law states that all new "infiltrators" are to be detained for three months. As of November 6, because only healthy young men entered the country as irregular migrants, the government detained them in Saharonim.

The Ministry of Interior released some identified victims of torture from the Saharonim facility and granted 25 persons temporary stays of orders to Holot facility in response to Hotline for Refugees and Migrants petitions. The government asserted that it would not send men who have family living in the country to Holot. Regulatory procedures, however, forced many families to separate because male heads of household did not have proper legal documentation to prove their status as married with dependents and were therefore required to report to Holot. According to NGOs, these documentation problems often resulted when families were forced to flee their countries of origin without important documentation, including marriage certificates. Some migrants and asylum seekers married locally but were hesitant to register their relationship status due to fear of legal repercussions and due to authorities' not recognizing other marriages.

Foreign Travel: Citizens generally were free to travel abroad provided they had no outstanding military obligations and no administrative restrictions. The government may bar citizens from leaving the country based on security considerations. Authorities do not permit any citizen to travel to any state officially at war with Israel without government permission. This restriction includes travel to Syria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. The Supreme Court upheld a 2014 decision by the Nazareth District Court sentencing former member of Knesset Said Naffaa to prison for traveling to Syria with a delegation of Druze leaders. In April 2014 the government detained and interrogated Majd Kayyal for five days after he returned from a trip to Lebanon, releasing him when a polygraph indicated he was innocent of the charge of "contacting a foreign agent."

Adalah alleged that the prohibition on travel to many Arab countries disproportionately discriminated against Arab-Israeli citizens and noted that authorities did not detain Jewish Israelis upon return from similar trips to unauthorized countries. The government required all citizens to have a special permit to enter "Area A" in the West Bank (the area, according to the Interim Agreement, in which the Palestinian Authority exercises civil and security responsibility), although the government allowed Palestinian citizens access without permits. Following a High Court instruction to the government in 2013 to implement new airport procedures, in March 2014 the Israel Airports Authority announced it had implemented new technology to ease screening procedures for Arab-Israeli citizens, eliminating the practice of searching suitcases in the departure hall. In March the Supreme Court rejected a petition by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel requesting the airport to eliminate racial profiling of Arab citizens.

In December 2014 the Supreme Court upheld a policy that did not allow Palestinians from Gaza to enter Israel to access courts for tort damages filed against the security forces, stating that it wanted to "give a chance" to new procedures and guidelines for facilitating entry into the country adopted by the attorney general.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: Since 2008 authorities have given the majority of asylum seekers a "conditional release visa" that requires renewal every one to four months. The government has thus far provided these individuals with a limited form of group protection with freedom of movement, protection against refoulement, and some informal access to the labor market. Access to health care, shelter, and education was available inconsistently. The protection environment, however, significantly deteriorated since the end of 2011 due to adoption of policies and legislation aimed at deterring future asylum seekers by making life difficult for those already in the country. These actions further curtailed the rights of the population and encouraged the departure of those already in the country.

The law provides for granting temporary asylum, and the government has established a system for providing temporary protection for most asylum seekers. The Refugee Status Determination Unit of the Population Immigration and Border Authority (PIBA) handles asylum requests and publicizes information on how to apply in its offices and on its website. The Ministry of Interior's RSD Unit set up a computer-based appointment system in Arabic and Tigrinya (Eritrean). The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, the African Refugee Development Center, UNHCR, and the Tel Aviv University Refugee Rights clinic, however, expressed continuing concerns regarding the accessibility, efficiency, and impartiality of the RSD Unit. These concerns applied especially to irregular migrants and asylum seekers who have been in the country for many years and to African migrants from Eritrea and Sudan, in particular. Authorities originally granted this population protected status and barred them from applying for RSD, a policy later changed without notification to much of the population.

RSD recognition rates were very low; the government has not granted any Sudanese asylum seekers refugee status and approved only 0.15 percent of the Eritrean asylum claims it has processed. Similarly, while the government has extended nonremoval and temporary visas to a number of Sudanese from Darfur, it has not adjudicated positively any of the cases in RSD processing during the year. In addition to these low rates, according to international organizations, a lack of transparency in the documentation and deliberation phases of the government's processes further

undermined confidence in the system, affecting views of the legitimacy of the government's regime for asylum seekers.

Through implementation of the "Anti-Infiltrator" laws, the government removed many of the benefits of temporary protection, but as of 2009 has permitted Africans, who were previously protected from deportation, to apply for RSD. Some of these individuals, however, applied through UNHCR upon arrival (and continued to have files with UNHCR that the government has not requested or accepted for transfer). Authorities have not informed others that they are eligible to apply. Still others were discouraged from applying by the government's policy summoning those who have applied to detention in Holot and by the very low rate of acceptance of refugee claims. According to an affidavit provided by Yossi Edelstein, head of the Enforcement Unit of PIBA, in February the RSD Unit was understaffed. This circumstance led to delays in processing refugee applications.

Additionally, UNHCR expressed concern about access to the RSD process for those in the Holot detention facility. It stated that detainees had difficulty accessing the forms to request refugee status and that Ministry of Interior staff did not effectively inform Holot detainees about the process of filing for RSD. During the year the government adopted a practice of requiring long-staying RSD applicants to provide an acceptable justification for not applying for RSD within their first year of residence in the country. UNHCR reported that authorities previously instructed applicants not to apply for RSD because of the temporary protection extended to them at the time. The government then rejected the majority of justification applications from these individuals.

Regarding the 2014 indictment of one Ministry of Interior clerk for accepting a bribe and providing forged documents to an asylum seeker from Sudan, the government stated this was a single individual who acted improperly and whom authorities acted immediately to suspend, reprimand, and eventually indict. The Hotline for Migrant Workers stood by their claim that in 2014 the immigration agency gave asylum seekers passports of other individuals to enable them to leave the country, while the government stated this claim had no basis.

The government stated it had reached agreements with two foreign countries with regard to the relocation of migrants from Sudan and Eritrea, and the attorney general conditioned his approval of the relocation policy on the assurance of certain protections in those countries. According to the government, from 2010 to 2015, a total of 12,300 migrants departed to safe foreign countries or to their country of origin voluntarily, with no cases of violations of the principle of nonrefoulement. As of November 23, 2,028 migrants exited the country voluntarily during the year, and officials stated the departure rate was 150 per month. According to UNHCR, if returned to their countries of origin, these individuals were likely to face major human rights violations, including the risk of death, torture, and life imprisonment.

Since the December 2014 Supreme Court ruling, the government continued to give Eritreans and Sudanese outside of detention renewable "conditional release" documents, but these must be renewed every one to two months, according to UNHCR and Hotline for Refugees and Migrants. Only three Ministry of Interior offices in the country renew these visas.

Government officials and media outlets continued to refer to asylum seekers as "infiltrators" and characterized them as directly associated with increases in crime, disease, and vagrancy.

Refoulement: The government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom could be threatened and stated its commitment to the principle of nonrefoulement. UNHCR credited the government in a report during the year for observing the principle of nonrefoulement. UNHCR warned, however, that refoulement could be a concern in view of the government's policy of forcing migrants either to depart the country or report for lengthy detention in Holot. The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants reported that over the course of the past two years, approximately 9,000 irregular migrants and asylum seekers departed the country through a "voluntary return" program. The government provided most returnees with paid tickets to either Uganda or Rwanda, although their governments did not provide assurances of legal residency or the right to work. The government did not confirm the existence of official agreements with these governments to accept migrants or asylum seekers although Rwandan President Paul Kagame confirmed discussions about formulating an agreement with the country in April, according to *Haaretz*. A Beer Sheva court upheld the legality of the secrecy of these agreements in response to a petition by NGOs. The government provided those departing a stipend paid in dollars of NIS 13,300 (\$3,410), and prior to departure, the Population and Immigration Authority and the Custody Review Tribunal reviewed mandatory recorded video interviews and written statements of those who opted to participate in the voluntary return program to verify they were departing voluntarily.

A coalition of NGO advocates for asylum seekers (including AI, Hotline, and the African Refugee Development Center) questioned the government's policy of sending migrants to another foreign country. These groups were concerned that the destination countries were not prepared to care for the asylum seekers and considered that, in some cases, this transfer could amount to refoulement. Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other NGOs reported that the voluntary return policy led to many individuals returning to their country of origin via the foreign countries where they did not receive permission to stay upon arrival or where their protection needs were not met. The government insisted those who departed "safe" foreign countries for their countries of origin had permission to stay and work in the foreign countries indefinitely and if they did leave, they did so voluntarily. HRW and the NGO Hotline for Refugees and Migrants documented the treatment of some returnees whom Sudanese and Eritrean authorities arrested upon their return to Sudan and Eritrea and whom those authorities reportedly surveilled, beat, threatened, and in some cases tortured.

On March 31, the government announced a new policy to deport migrants from Eritrea and Sudan by sending them to other countries in Africa. The government explained that this procedure would initially apply to those held in Holot (2,000 at the time) who either never applied for asylum or who had applied and been rejected. By November authorities had notified 43 persons that they must either depart from Israel to a country in Africa or go to prison indefinitely.

NGOs filed a court case questioning the safety of this policy, and the Supreme Court decided that for the duration of the court case, those migrants affected could remain outside of jail. On November 9, the Beer Sheva District Court ruled against the migrants and NGO petition, stating that the government may use its process for relocating migrants. The court recommended the government delay actual implementation until a process for monitoring those who travel is established. As of November 23, no migrants were known to have been jailed under this policy.

Refugee Abuse: Communities with a large concentration of African migrants were occasionally targets of violence. The Tel Aviv municipality dedicated a special police unit to combat violence and crime in the migrant community. Additionally, the nature of government policies on the legality

of work forced many refugees to work in "unofficial" positions, making them more susceptible to poor treatment and questionable work practices by their employers. Following the 2013 arrest of four persons for attacks that police believed were racially motivated, the courts convicted the suspects in September 2014 of assault and robbery offenses and issued sentences ranging from nine months of suspended imprisonment to 24 months' imprisonment. The court also fined the perpetrators and ordered them to pay compensation to the victims.

Immediately following the killing of a soldier by an Israeli Bedouin attacker in Beer Sheva on October 19 (see section 1.a.), a security guard shot Eritrean asylum seeker Haptom Zerhom, whom the guard mistakenly believed was a second attacker. A group of onlookers then beat the injured Eritrean man, who later died. Pathologists later confirmed the cause of death was the gunshot wound. Authorities arrested four persons for aggravated assault, including two members of the IPS; authorities released all four on bail and prohibited them from contacting one another. Additionally, authorities summoned two IDF soldiers and a civilian for questioning.

Employment: Recognized refugees received renewable work visas. During the year many asylum seekers who once had B/1 work visas had this status downgraded, and most held a 2A5 visa, which explicitly reads, "This is not a work visa." The government previously allowed asylum seekers to work in the informal sector but not to open their own businesses or to register to pay value-added tax, although the law does not prohibit these activities. The Ministry of Interior conducted media campaigns to warn employers against hiring illegal foreign workers.

Following the release of asylum seekers from the Holot facility on August 24 and 25, the government prohibited them from going to Eilat and Tel Aviv in part to keep them from working there, and municipal officials in other areas stated they would oppose asylum seekers relocating to their communities. Nevertheless, the media reported that companies that provided labor sent representatives to Holot to interview those released for possible employment in hotels at the Dead Sea or elsewhere outside of Tel Aviv and Eilat. Hostility towards asylum seekers lessened with the increase in individual terror attacks in October and November, with at least one municipal official suggesting replacement of Arab workers with asylum seekers.

The government reserves the right to demand unpaid value-added tax and levy substantial fines against business proprietors for operating businesses without a tax exemption. African asylum seekers in the Holot open facility may not work outside the facility, but some worked inside the facility for less than the minimum wage. Some of the facility's services depended on detainee labor.

The law bars migrants from sending money abroad, limits the amount they may take with them when they leave to the minimum wage for the number of months they resided in the country, and defines taking money out of the country as a money-laundering crime.

Access to Basic Services: Access to health care, shelter, and education was available on an inconsistent basis. Recognized refugees received social services, including access to the national health-care system, but the government did not provide asylum seekers with public social benefits such as health insurance. The government stated it provided infirmary services, including laboratory services, medical imaging, and general and mental hospitalization services in the Holot facility for individuals held there, including asylum seekers. UNHCR reported that when accessing health services, translation was often provided by another detainee, compromising confidentiality and potentially affecting the quality of treatment. The government sponsored a mobile clinic, and

mother and infant health-care stations in south Tel Aviv, which were accessible to migrants and asylum seekers. The clinic provided health and dental services, sexually transmitted disease evaluation and treatment, and prenatal and infant medical care.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection primarily to Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers. The Ministry of Interior began processing asylum applications of Eritreans and Sudanese in detention in 2014. The ministry continued to reject the applications of almost all Eritrean detainees, concluding that military desertion provided insufficient grounds for presenting a subjective fear of persecution and disregarding further evidence presented on conditions in Eritrea should individuals return.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage, and citizens exercised this ability.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Observers considered parliamentary elections held in March free and fair. In 2014 a change in the law raised the electoral threshold from 2 percent of votes to 3.25 percent of votes, a move some civil society organizations criticized for its limitation on freedom of representation and its potential effect on parties representing the Arab minority. The four Arab-majority parties represented in the Knesset united into one faction, the Joint List, winning 13 seats and becoming the third-largest faction in Knesset.

On March 17, the evening of the election, Prime Minister Netanyahu used rhetoric intolerant of Arab citizens in an effort to generate votes for his party. He later apologized for his comments.

On March 20, prior to the start of the coalition negotiations, the attorney general issued binding rules to the government to limit the bargaining power of the parties. Under the new guidelines, parties do not enjoy a separate allocation within the government budget. Allocations promised as part of a coalition agreement would be integrated into the budget of the relevant ministry for the activity for which they were destined and would be fully transparent. The Office of the Attorney General published the guidelines as part of the lessons learned from the irregularities in the allocation of budgets stemming from coalition agreements.

Chair of the Central Elections Committee Salim Jubran cautioned the chairpersons of all political parties against issuing calls prohibiting women from standing for election. His statement followed an appeal that cited multiple incidents of threatening speech, including an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who stated that a woman who stood for election would lose her livelihood and have her children expelled from religious schools.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The Basic Laws prohibit the candidacy of any party or individual that denies the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people or the democratic character of the state or that incites racism. Otherwise, political parties operated without

restriction or interference. The Northern Islamic Movement continued its practice of prohibiting its members from running for local or national office and boycotting elections.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Women and minorities participated in political life on the same legal basis as men or nonminority citizens. The law provides an additional 15 percent in campaign funding to municipal party lists composed of at least one-third women. Although senior political and social leaders often came from among veterans of the predominantly male officer corps, women participated widely in politics, including in leadership positions up to prime minister. Women faced significant cultural barriers in political parties representing conservative religious movements and the Arab minority, although elections during the year resulted in two female Knesset members represented on the Joint List. Following the parliamentary elections, the 120-member Knesset had 29 female members and 15 Arab members. The 22-member cabinet included three women, and one woman and one Druze were deputy ministers; there were no Arabs. Four members of the 15-member Supreme Court were women, and one was Arab. For the first time, an Arab citizen of Israel, Aida Touma Suliman, chaired a permanent committee in the Knesset, the Committee on the Status of Women.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government implemented these laws effectively. There were reports of government corruption, although impunity was not a problem.

Corruption: The media routinely reported on corruption. The national police, the state comptroller, the attorney general, and the accountant general are responsible for combating official corruption. These entities operated effectively and independently, and authorities sufficiently resourced them. NGOs that focused on anticorruption efforts operated freely without government interference.

The government continued to investigate and prosecute top political figures. In April authorities convicted Rabbi Yeshayahu Pinto of bribing senior police officers in connection with an investigation of alleged fraud by a charitable organization he headed. As part of a plea bargain in which Pinto gave evidence against the head of the National Crime Unit, Police Commander Menashe Arbiv, he received a reduced sentence of one year in jail and a fine of NIS one million (\$256,000). The investigation of Arbiv continued at year's end.

On May 14, the government filed indictments against lawyer Ronel Fisher, retired police superintendent Eran Malka, former Tel Aviv district attorney Ruth Blum-David, and several business figures. Authorities variously charged the accused with taking and giving bribes, fraud and breach of trust, fraudulent receipt of assets in aggravated circumstances, money laundering, or obstruction of justice, each according to his or her role in the corruption affair. Authorities accused attorney Blum-David of obstructing justice in relation to two cases of giving and taking bribes in exchange for privileged information about ongoing criminal investigations, and of receiving assets obtained through crime. Emerging from the indictments were allegations that Fisher had operated a criminal network, reaching law-enforcement bodies. Authorities alleged retired police superintendent Eran Malka, a senior police officer in the Lahav 433 National Fraud Unit, was a key

figure in the ring's obstruction of justice. Further developments in the trial were pending at year's end.

On December 2, a Tel Aviv court indicted former Knesset member and minister for industry, trade, and labor, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, on charges of bribery, fraud, breach of trust, money laundering, and tax evasion.

On May 25, the Jerusalem District Court sentenced former prime minister Ehud Olmert to eight months in prison, following a conviction for fraud and breach of trust in the Talansky "cash envelopes" case. In July, Olmert filed another appeal to the Supreme Court, which again agreed to suspend Olmert's sentence, pending the appeal. On December 29, the Supreme Court ruled on Olmert's appeal of separate charges from 2014 in the "Holyland" affair, accepting his appeal of some charges but maintaining his sentence of 18 months in prison for bribery. Olmert was scheduled to begin serving his sentence in February 2016.

On May 31, a Tel Aviv court sentenced Ramat Hasharon mayor Yitzhak Rochberger to six months of community service and fined him NIS 40,000 (\$10,300) following his conviction for fraud and other crimes of moral turpitude. As part of the sentence, he cannot return to public office for at least seven years. Under the terms of a 2014 plea bargain, in April courts sentenced former Bat Yam mayor Shlomo Lahiani to eight months in jail on three counts of breach of trust.

Financial Disclosure: Senior officials are subject to comprehensive financial disclosure laws, and the Civil Service Commission verifies their disclosures. Authorities do not make information in these disclosures public without the consent of the person who submitted the disclosure. There is no specific criminal sanction for noncompliance.

Public Access to Information: The law requires governmental agencies to make internal regulations, administrative procedures, and directives available to the public. All governmental agencies did not effectively implement the law.

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

Numerous domestic and international human rights groups operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally cooperative, responsive to their views, and routinely invited NGOs critical of the government to participate in Knesset hearings on proposed legislation. Human rights NGOs have standing to petition the Supreme Court directly regarding governmental policies and may appeal individual cases to the Supreme Court. A unit in the Foreign Ministry maintained relations with certain international and domestic NGOs.

Israeli and Palestinian NGOs, particularly those focused on human rights problems and critical of the government, asserted, however, that the government sought to intimidate and stigmatize them for their receipt of foreign funding.

The coalition agreement signed in March between the Likud and Jewish Home parties included a commitment to advance legislation addressing foreign funding of NGOs. NGOs focused on human rights problems and critical of the government said this was an effort to target them as they would be most negatively affected by the legislation. The Ministerial Committee on Legislation in December approved a draft amendment to the law on public disclosure of funding for NGOs, and it was pending a first Knesset reading at year's end.

In June Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely instructed the Israeli embassy in Switzerland to take action to stop the planned Swiss government-sponsored exhibition in Zurich by Breaking the Silence, an advocacy group composed of veterans, on the grounds that it tarnished the image of the country and its military.

In July, Hotovely held a series of private consultations with European foreign ministers, their deputies, and their ambassadors to Israel, during which she accused their governments of providing financial assistance to Israeli and Palestinian NGOs that she claimed were working to "delegitimize Israel under the guise of human rights." Media reported that Hotovely identified human rights NGOs, including B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence, and the Adalah Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights as among the organizations whose work delegitimized Israel and received support from foreign governments. Hotovely reportedly claimed that if they continued to fund them, the government would pass legislation restricting or taxing donations to Israeli NGOs from foreign states (see section 2.b.).

The Ministry of Interior continued to deny foreign nationals affiliated with certain pro-Palestinian NGOs and solidarity organizations entry into the country. Authorities required some foreign nationals to sign declarations stating their understanding that "all relevant legal actions" would be taken against them, "including deportation and denial of entry into Israel for a period of up to 10 years," if they traveled through the country to Palestinian Authority-controlled areas without appropriate authorization. The government stated it took this action on an individual basis, not according to the activities or platform of the NGOs with which these persons were affiliated.

The director general of the National Civil Service ended the participation of the NGOs ACRI and B'Tselem in the national service volunteer program. In 2014 the director general alleged these organizations engaged in defamation and incitement against Israeli soldiers.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government generally cooperated with the United Nations and other international bodies. The government continued its participation in the UN Human Rights Council, including the Universal Periodic Review process, although it did not reverse its 2013 partial suspension of its coordination with UNESCO. Moreover, the government prevented the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on the situation in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 from gaining access to the West Bank.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The state comptroller also served as ombudsman for human rights problems. The ombudsman investigated complaints against statutory bodies that are subject to audit by the state comptroller, including government ministries, local authorities, government enterprises and institutions, government corporations, and their employees. The ombudsman is entitled to use any relevant means of inquiry and has the authority to order any person or body to assist in the inquiry.

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

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, sex, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation and gender identity, or social status, and the government was generally effective in enforcing these prohibitions. Adalah maintained a database of more than 50 laws it claimed discriminated – either explicitly or in practice – against Arab citizens.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape, including spousal rape, is a felony punishable by 16 years in prison, or up to 20 years' imprisonment for rape under aggravated circumstances or if the perpetrator rapes or commits a sexual offense against a relative. The government effectively enforced rape laws. The government reported that in 2014 police opened 219 cases of spousal rape. In the same year, the government also received 6,333 complaints of sex-related offenses. As of October 12, 732 complaints led to indictments; 1,083 were closed because the offender was unknown; 1,879 were closed for lack of evidence; 533 were closed for lack of public interest; and 2,106 remained open.

The government reported that it opened 17,939 domestic violence cases in 2014, of which women brought 80 percent.

During the year family members killed or were alleged to have killed 10 women in what the government termed "murders due to family disputes" and women's rights groups termed "femicides." For example, Tasnim Abu Kweidar, from an unrecognized Bedouin village, was killed in August, and NGOs alleged the details of her killing indicated "family honor" might have been a motive. Arab and Jewish women's rights groups protested against what they perceived to be police inaction and societal indifference or support for such actions. The government stated that police have developed procedures and trained special investigators to deal with domestic violence, sex offenses, and the violation of protective orders in diverse communities, including the Arab community.

In Lod, a community where domestic violence has been a significant problem, police collaborated with the Ministry of Welfare to develop a response to Arab women at risk. This effort resulted in a reduction in the number of domestic homicides from 10 each year to two. NGOs, including Women Against Violence, Na'am, and The Abraham Fund Initiative, worked within Arab and mixed communities to counter femicide.

The Ministry of Public Security continued to allow armed security guards to take their weapons home at the end of their shifts, a practice reinstated in 2014 after the ministry prohibited it in 2013 when a coalition of NGOs raised concerns about the high rate of spousal killings by security guards using service weapons. Authorities extended through the end of the year in response to a wave of terrorist attacks. The ministry announced strict regulations governing the storage of weapons at home and in public.

News reports indicated a 47-percent decline in reports to authorities of sex offenses during the year; according to the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel, the majority of rape victims did not

report the crime to authorities due to social and cultural pressure. Women from certain Orthodox Jewish, Muslim, Bedouin, and Druze communities faced significant social pressure not to report rape or domestic abuse. In collaboration with the chair of the Knesset Committee for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality, Aida Touma Suliman, Minister of Religious Affairs David Azulay announced an initiative to train and empower ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) women to talk about problems of sexual abuse and domestic violence within their community. Experts in the field of social work and domestic violence prevention highlighted the reluctance of many Arab women to avail themselves of social services due to societal pressure and personal identification as Palestinians. The government cooperated with The Abraham Fund Initiative on a pilot program to provide training for professionals in the field of domestic violence within the Arab community, bringing law enforcement officers, social workers, NGOs, and religious leaders together to coordinate services for victims of domestic violence.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services operated 14 battered women's shelters and a hotline for reporting abuse. Two of these were dedicated to the assistance of women from the Arab community, and two others were dedicated to caring for a mixed population of Arab and Jewish women. Of 89 centers for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence throughout the country, 22 operated in Arab communities and eight in mixed Arab-Jewish cities. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services assisted women involved in prostitution, including emergency shelters, daytime centers, and therapeutic hostels.

Authorities established a special interministerial board headed by the deputy director general of the Ministry of Public Security to address the continuing problem of domestic violence. In July 2014 the board presented interim findings and recommendations to the Committee for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality in Knesset; final suggestions for implementation were pending as of November 23.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law prohibits FGM/C. There were no reports of FGM/C on women age 18 or older. There were no reports of the practice on girls under age 18.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: On August 20, *Haaretz* reported that the justice minister and the attorney general announced that "steps will be taken to enforce the law against polygamy," working collaboratively with social service providers. Some in the Arab community expressed concern these measures would negatively affect women and children financially and that the effort should focus first on education and on the sharia courts that perform marriages, while others heralded the move.

Cases of domestic homicides of women perpetrated in defense of family honor continued to occur within the Arab community, contributing to a disproportionate number of killings of Arab women (see also section 6, Women, Rape and Domestic Violence).

Police conducted weekly assessments of threatened women to determine the level of threat and required protection and worked with government social welfare institutes and NGOs to safeguard threatened women.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is illegal but remained widespread. The law requires that suspected victims of harassment be informed of their right to assistance. Penalties for sexual harassment depend on the severity of the act and whether blackmail is involved. Police notified all

known victims of their right to receive assistance from the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel. The law provides that victims may be informed of the progress on their cases through a computerized system and information call center. The Central Bureau of Statistics conducted a poll for the Ministry of Public Security that indicated 98 percent of sexual harassment victims did not go to the police.

Harassment based on gender segregation continued in some public places, including on public buses. A Beit Shemesh court ruled in favor of and awarded damages of NIS 60,000 (\$15,400) to four local Orthodox women who complained the municipality had not complied with a previous ruling to eliminate signs in public places requesting members of the public to dress modestly.

The Ministry of Transportation and Road Safety operated a 24-hour hotline to report complaints on public transportation, including segregation.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of having children; to manage their reproductive health; and to have access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. Social and religious pressure on women in Haredi communities often led them to seek approval from a rabbi to use contraception.

Discrimination: In the secular criminal and civil courts, women and men enjoy the same rights, but in some matters religious courts – responsible for adjudication of family law, including divorce – limit the rights of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Druze women. Women and men who do not belong to a recognized religious group face additional discrimination. A Jewish woman is allowed to initiate divorce proceedings, but both the husband and wife must give consent to make the divorce final. Because some men refused to grant divorces, thousands of women could not remarry or give birth to legitimate children. In rare cases this rule happened in reverse, with women refusing to grant men divorces. Rabbinical tribunals sometimes sanctioned a husband who refused to give his wife a divorce, while also declining to grant the divorce without his consent.

A Muslim woman may petition for and receive a divorce through the sharia courts without her husband's consent under certain conditions, and a marriage contract may provide for other circumstances in which she may obtain a divorce without his consent. A Muslim man may divorce his wife without her consent and without petitioning the court. Through ecclesiastical courts, Christians may seek official separations or divorces, depending on their denomination. Druze divorces are performed by an oral declaration of the husband alone and then registered through the Druze religious courts, placing the disproportionate burden on the woman to immediately leave the home with her children. A civil family court or a religious court settles child custody, alimony, and property matters after the divorce, which gives preference to the father unless it can be demonstrated that a child especially "needs" the mother.

Although the law prohibits discrimination based on gender in employment and wages and provides for class action antidiscrimination suits, a wage gap between men and women persisted. According to data published by the Central Bureau of Statistics on March 4, women on average earned 14 percent less per hour than men.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women in the Prime Minister's Office works to mainstream women's participation in the government and private sector, and to combat sexual

harassment and domestic violence. The authority requires every city, local council, and government ministry to have an adviser working to advance women's issues. A government resolution requires ministers to appoint women to the directorates of government-owned companies until representation reaches 50 percent; at the end of 2014, women's representation was at 44 percent (see also section 7.d.). The law requires that at least one of two governmental representatives on the Committee for Appointment of Religious Judges be a woman; in July authorities appointed seven men and four women to the committee.

Discrimination in the form of gender segregation continued in some public places, including in public health clinics and at the Western Wall. Negotiations between the government and Reform and Conservative Jewish religious movements to establish a separate, permanent space for egalitarian prayer at the section of the Western Wall south of the Mughrabi bridge (in addition to the existing gender-segregated prayer areas where regulation prohibits women from leading prayers, singing aloud, or holding or reading from Torah scrolls) remained stalled at year's end. Non-Orthodox and mixed gender groups used a temporary prayer area at the southern section of the wall that was "administered with a pluralistic approach," according to the government, for religious ceremonies such as bar and bat mitzvahs.

In December the Attorney General's Office and three female members of the Knesset urged the rabbi of the Western Wall, Shmuel Rabinovitch, to include women in the official Hanukkah candle-lighting ceremony. Rabinovitch had stated that he had no intention of allowing women to participate in the ceremony. Deputy Attorney General Dina Silber stated that separation of women and men in the public sphere was "unsound and severe discrimination against women for being women."

According to media reports, on December 1, at a conference in Bnei Brak, leading rabbis in the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox community issued an order to the principals of ultra-Orthodox institutions not to recognize the degrees of women who study in academic institutions. They also banned ultra-Orthodox women from attending colleges and universities, saying a woman's higher pay resulting from higher education was "a danger to the entire structure of the household."

In ultra-Orthodox areas of Jerusalem, vandals damaged images of women participating in bat mitzvah celebrations in advertisements.

During election primaries, some residents of the ultra-Orthodox community in Bnei Brak wanted campaign signs with women's images removed. Police responded that it would be illegal to remove the signs, and they remained. Nevertheless, incidents that excluded women persisted. According to a June media report, authorities did not allow a group of female high school students who trained to be volunteers with Magen David Adom ambulance service to fulfill the duties for which they trained because male ambulance drivers refused to ride with the women.

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive citizenship at birth within or outside of the country if at least one parent is a citizen. Births are supposed to be registered within 10 days of the delivery, and according to the law, births are only registered in the country if the parents are citizens or permanent residents. Any child born in an Israeli hospital receives an official document from the hospital that affirms his or her birth, the mother's details, and the father's details as based on a joint

declaration made by both the father and the mother. The country registers the births of Palestinians in Jerusalem, although Palestinian residents of Jerusalem reported delays in the process.

According to the National Council for the Child, 156,448 children in the country lacked citizenship and its corresponding rights. The council noted this number did not include the children of asylum seekers or irregular migrants. The government confirmed that it does not legally register children born to noncitizens or nonresidents or whose parents stayed in the country illegally, and they are not eligible for the rights provided to a citizen or permanent resident. The figure included children of legal and illegal foreign workers and children of mixed marriages, especially those between Arab-Israelis and Palestinian residents of the occupied territories. The government stated that a child's status derives from a parent's status; if one of the parents is an Israeli citizen and the other is not, the child may be registered as Israeli as long as he or she lives with the parent who is an Israeli citizen or permanent resident.

According to UNHCR the Ministry of Interior issues a Confirmation of Birth document, which is not a birth certificate, for children without legal residency status in the country, including children of asylum seekers and migrant workers and children of international students and others who do not hold Israeli citizenship. At times the government refused to list the father's name or to give the child the father's last name on the Confirmation of Birth document. The Ministry of Interior requires parents without a permit to sign a form declaring they are "present illegally" in the country before issuing this document. A petition to require the government to issue an official birth document listing both parents' names remained pending before the Supreme Court as of November 23. The government stated the sides have come to an agreement that the Ministry of Interior would issue an official document confirming the birth of the child, signed by a government official, which parents could, in turn, use for their overseas needs. The father's details would be included based on a joint declaration of both parents.

Education: Primary and secondary education is free and universal through age 17. The government continued implementing a 2007 law to make education compulsory through grade 12, but for budgetary reasons, a February 2014 decision by the Knesset Education Committee postponed implementation of the Compulsory Education Law (integrating children ages three to five) until the 2015-16 school year. The government continued to expand free public preschool beginning at or slightly before age three and established new elementary, middle, and high schools. The government did not enforce compulsory education, however, in unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev, and Bedouin children, particularly girls, continued to have the highest illiteracy rate in the country. The government stated, however, that due to the increased proximity and accessibility of new schools and the dedication of additional funds for education of the Bedouin population, attendance rates for Bedouin students rose and dropout rates declined during the year. The government operated separate public schools for Hebrew-speaking children and Arabic-speaking children. For Jewish children there were separate public schools available for religious and secular families. Individual families may choose a school for their children to attend regardless of ethnicity. By law these two school systems receive government funding equivalent to public schools, although they do not consistently teach a basic curriculum, including math, sciences, humanities, and languages.

The government partially funded "recognized but not official schools," which are required to teach a corresponding percentage of the national curriculum and have greater administrative autonomy than public schools. Some schools in the "recognized but not official" category petitioned the

government for reinstatement of prior levels of funding in 2014; the petition was pending a hearing and review by the government at the end of the year. On September 1, schools in the same category belonging to the Secretariat of Christian Schools went on strike to protest what they claimed was unequal government funding as compared to the two politically affiliated ultra-Orthodox school systems. The government stated that it had dedicated additional resources to students living in the country's periphery and in disadvantaged communities that resulted in the addition of school hours, funding for formal and informal educational programs, and teacher enrichment in these communities.

Medical Care: The government provides preventive health services to minors without civil status who are younger than age six. It also provides services similar to those provided citizen children to noncitizen minors younger than age 18, regardless of their legal status in country, if their parents register them with the "Meuhedet" health-care fund. This arrangement does not include minors whose guardian is a resident of the Palestinian Authority, and it does not cover pre-existing conditions.

Child Abuse: The National Council of the Child received a number of complaints during the year of abuses related to health, availability of welfare services, education, physical and sexual abuse, child pornography, and poor educational environments. In November 2014 the council released the results of a survey of more than 10,000 youths, which showed a significant discrepancy between the number of children and youth who reported some type of abuse through the survey versus the number of reports made to child protection officers. The study revealed that 49 percent of minors in the country (including 68 percent of Arab minors) have been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused, while only 2 percent of the youth population had reported abuse to social workers.

The law requires mandatory reporting of any suspicion of child abuse. It also requires social service employees, medical and education professionals, and other officials to report indications that minors were victims of, engaged in, or coerced into prostitution, sexual offenses, abandonment, neglect, assault, abuse, or human trafficking. The government stated that police immediately attend to each case forwarded to them from the National Council for the Child or any other source. Police maintained that they assign officers with special training in dealing with child abuse without distinction to ethnic or racial background. NGOs, however, expressed concern regarding police negligence in child abuse and domestic violence cases reported in minority communities.

The government provided specialized training to psychologists, offered a free psychological treatment program to treat child victims of sexual offenses, and operated a 24-hour emergency hotline. The Ministry of Education operated a special unit for sexuality and for prevention of abuse of children and youth that assisted the education system in prevention and appropriate intervention in cases of suspected abuse of minors.

According to police in 2012, minors filed two-thirds of the more than 5,000 complaints of sex crimes. The most common offense against minors – more than 50 percent of the cases – was molestation. Approximately one-quarter of those complaints were for rape.

During March and April, six children of migrants/asylum seekers died within five weeks. All six were in the supervision of workers in day care centers that served the migrant community and were known to lack resources. Following the deaths the government announced it would allocate 56 million NIS (\$14.4 million) to establish alternative daycare centers.

Early and Forced Marriage: The law sets the minimum age of marriage at 18, with some exceptions for younger children due to pregnancy and for couples older than 16 if the court permitted it due to unique circumstances.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits sexual exploitation of a minor and sets a penalty of seven to 20 years in prison for violators, depending on the circumstances. The law prohibits child pornography. The minimum age for consensual sex is 16. Consensual sexual relations with a minor between the ages of 14 and 16 constitute statutory rape punishable by five years' imprisonment.

The government supported a number of programs to combat sexual exploitation of children, including establishing an interministerial research team, preparing educational materials, and conducting numerous training sessions for government and police officials.

According to information gathered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services, the rate of incidents of sexual abuse doubled during the year, reportedly due in part to greater identification and reporting. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services operated six centers specializing in care of children and youths who experienced sexual or emotional abuse.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information, see the Department of State's report on compliance at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html and country-specific information at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/israel.html.

Anti-Semitism

Jews constituted approximately 80 percent of the population. The government often defined crimes targeting Jews as nationalistic crimes relating to the overall Palestinian-Israeli conflict rather than anti-Semitism.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's [Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

Persons with Disabilities

The Basic Laws provide a legal framework for prohibiting discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment (including hiring, work environment, and evaluation), education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, and the provision of other government services. The 1998 Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law augments the Basic Laws and specifically prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities, including with regard to public facilities and services. This legislation mandates access to buildings, transportation, and physical accommodations and services in the workplace, and access to mental health services as part of government-subsidized health insurance. In July 2014 the minister of economy signed an order requiring that 2 percent of the workforce of employers with more than 100 employees be persons with disabilities with the proportion rising to 3 percent beginning in October. According to NGOs, government progress in enforcing these laws was limited. Government agencies for persons with disabilities worked to encourage leadership from within the community of persons with disabilities.

Societal discrimination and lack of accessibility persisted in employment, housing, and education. According to the Commissioner for the Rights of People with Disabilities, although the employment rate of persons with disabilities rose between 2007 and 2012, the rate remained lower than the employment rate for persons without disabilities, and many people with disabilities who are working have part-time, low-wage jobs. The Ministry of the Economy decreed that all sectors should increase their hiring so that persons with disabilities would constitute 3 percent of the workforce by the end of 2017, and the government continues to provide support and education for employers and workers with disabilities to close the gap. According to the commissioner for the rights of people with disabilities, 100 percent of municipal buses and 60 percent of intercity buses were accessible, as of November 23.

The advocacy organization Bizchut reported that Arab citizens with disabilities were employed at roughly half the rate of Jews with disabilities. Shortages of funding for Arab municipalities, including for education, adversely affected Arabs with disabilities.

Access to community-based independent living facilities for persons with disabilities remained limited. According to the disability rights NGO Bizchut, more than 8,000 persons with intellectual disabilities lived in institutions and large hostels while only 1,500 lived in community-based settings. During the year the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services began implementing a pilot program to move 900 persons with intellectual disabilities from institutions into community-based housing facilities over the next three years.

The law prioritizes access by persons with disabilities to public services, such as eliminating waiting in line as well as providing adapted seating and accessible facilities in public places other than buildings, such as public beaches, municipal parks, swimming pools, and cemeteries. For hearing-impaired persons, the law provides for short-message public-announcement services.

The Commission for Equal Rights of People with Disabilities within the MOJ oversees the implementation of laws protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and worked with government ministries to enact regulations. The Unit for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities in the Labor Market, located within the Ministry of Economy, examined and promoted the employment of persons with disabilities. The unit had three support centers designed to assist employers who wish to hire persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services provides accommodation to persons with intellectual disabilities and/or autism who are either suspects or victims in criminal investigations.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Arab citizens, many of whom self-identify as Palestinian, faced institutional and societal discrimination, particularly in the wake of a wave of terrorist attacks by individuals of Palestinian or Arab descent in September and through the end of the year. There were multiple instances of security services or other citizens racially profiling Arab citizens, as well as instances of revenge attacks directed towards or being carried out against Arabs.

In one case on October 9, a 17-year-old Jewish Israeli stabbed four Arabs in the southern Israeli town of Dimona. When interrogated, he told police that his conviction that "all Arabs are terrorists" motivated him. Authorities charged him with "damage to health under aggravated circumstances,"

and a psychiatric evaluation was pending, according to police. Prime Minister Netanyahu condemned the attack.

There were also cases in which security forces or citizens targeted other citizens not carrying out attacks. On October 9, security forces shot an Arab woman from Nazareth between four and six times at an Afula bus station in northern Israel after she reportedly brandished a knife. Police backed away from an initial assessment that she intended to carry out an attack and were investigating whether she was mentally unstable at the time. On November 5, a Nazareth court released her to house arrest and absolved her of charges related to terror and attempted murder; trial proceedings for a remaining charge of carrying a dangerous weapon were pending at year's end.

In two incidents in January and February, Jewish attackers beat two Druze citizens in incidents the victims claim had nationalist motivations. On January 25, assailants attacked Tommy Hassoun at the Central Bus Station in West Jerusalem after overhearing him speak Arabic; six persons were arrested in connection to the incident. On February 5, Razzi Houseysa was hospitalized with facial wounds after assailants attacked him in Kibbutz Yagur; police briefly detained two men but released them, concluding the altercation was not motivated by nationalism and rejecting Houseysa's claim he was targeted because he spoke Arabic.

In June Druze residents of the Golan Heights, approximately 10 percent of whom hold Israeli citizenship, attacked a military ambulance transporting injured Syrians near Majdal Shams in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights because of anger over Syrian attacks on Druze villages across the border. Assailants killed one Syrian man and injured the other. On August 10, authorities charged Amal Abu Salah and Bashira Mahmoud with murder, and authorities arrested 30 other suspects during the investigation. The spiritual leader of the Druze community, Mowafak Tarif, condemned the attacks, as did the prime minister and other senior ministers and government officials.

In July an Israeli television station exposed a policy by some of the Cafe Cafe chain of coffee shops not to employ Arabs by placing calls to the establishments and inquiring whether jobs were available. A labor court fined the Tel Aviv port location of this chain NIS 35,000 (\$9,000). A 2014 survey commissioned by the Economy Ministry's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission found 42 percent of employers would prefer not to hire Arab men and 41 percent would prefer not to hire an Arab mother of young children. Of all respondents 46 percent said they were reluctant to work with an Arab man, and 28 percent said the same about working with an Arab woman (see section 7.d.).

In October several municipal school systems, including in Tel Aviv, Rishon Le-Tzion, Hod Hasharon, Rehovot, Givatayim, and Modi'in, ordered their mostly Arab construction, janitorial, and maintenance workers – as well as workers on nearby construction projects – to be absent from school premises when students were present, citing pressure from parents. Media reports and civil society organizations alleged that in some cases, these orders explicitly targeted Arab Palestinians and Arab citizens of Israel.

"Price tag" attacks (property crimes and violent acts by extremist Jewish individuals and groups) continued throughout the country, targeting Arab (including Christian and Muslim) and some Jewish institutions, with the frequency of attacks spiking in September and through the end of the year. The most common offenses, according to police, were attacks on vehicles, defacement of real estate, harm to Muslim and Christian holy sites, assault, and damage to agricultural lands. For

example, on June 18, arsonists burned a large section of the Church of the Multiplication in Tabgha and scrawled on the building's stone walls sections of the Jewish prayer book that in this context denigrated Christians. The government detained 21 persons in connection with this and similar acts, and some remained under house arrest or administrative detention at the end of the year. In late July the government announced five persons, including one minor, were responsible for the attack and filed indictments against two of them, taking "administrative steps" against the other three. After initially declining to pay for repairs of the church, saying it did not fall under protections against acts of terror, the government agreed to pay 3.9 million NIS (\$1.0 million) to restore the site.

In July the Jerusalem District Court sentenced brothers Shlomo and Nahman Twito, members of the extremist organization Lehava, to two years and two-and-a-half years, respectively, in prison for setting fire to two first-grade classrooms in the Arabic-Hebrew bilingual Max Rayne Hand in Hand school in West Jerusalem in November 2014. In addition to the fire, slogans in Hebrew with racist messages, including "Death to Arabs" and "There is no coexistence with cancer," were written on the wall. In December the Jerusalem District Court sentenced Yitzhak Gabai to a combined sentence of three years in prison: two years for participating in the November 2014 school attack on the Max Rayne Hand in Hand school, 10 months for social media posts that constituted incitement to violence, and two more months for the possession of a knife.

The courts convicted – and sentenced to prison – three individuals for a 2013 attack on an Arab-Israeli municipal street cleaner in Tel Aviv. Following an August 2014 attack on two Palestinians in Beit Hanina, authorities indicted 10 Jerusalem residents for assault and obstruction of justice.

The law exempts Arab citizens, except for Druze men, from mandatory military service, but a small percentage served voluntarily. Citizens who did not perform military service enjoyed fewer societal and economic benefits and sometime faced discrimination in hiring. Citizens generally are ineligible to work in companies with defense contracts or in security-related fields if they have not served in the military. Some Druze opposed their inclusion in mandatory military service, and authorities jailed them for refusing to serve. The government managed a National Civil Service program for citizens not drafted for military service, giving Arabs, some ultra-Orthodox Jews, Orthodox Jewish women, and others the opportunity to provide public service in their own communities and thus be eligible for the same financial benefits accorded military veterans. Many in the Arab community opposed the National Civil Service program because it operated under the auspices of government ministries associated with security. There were also multiple instances of ultra-Orthodox communities ostracizing ultra-Orthodox soldiers for serving in the military. In November the Knesset voted to extend deadlines for mandatory conscription of men in the ultra-Orthodox community.

On December 30, the cabinet approved the largest ever (15 billion NIS or \$3.85 billion) plan to increase economic integration and reduction of societal gaps over the coming five years.

In an October 2014 study, the NGO Sikkuy found that the main cause of unequal resources for many Arab local authorities was their low tax base, requiring central government investment in economic and social development. The government initiated and continued several programs to support disadvantaged populations and periphery communities in general and the Arab community in particular.

In August the government and the Joint List, representing the country's Arab-majority parties, agreed on a multi-year plan for economic integration and reduction of societal gaps. The plan includes one-time budgetary supplements to Arab local councils totaling NIS 200 million (\$51 million), with up to an additional NIS 700 million (\$179 million) for which local councils can apply over the next five years. The government employed affirmative action policies for persons of Arab descent, including members of Druze communities, and for non-Arab, Muslim Circassian communities, in the civil service. As of October authorities had designated 1,508 positions for these communities and filled 1,256 of them. The Education Ministry continued implementing a plan to place 500 Arab teachers in positions in predominantly Jewish schools by 2020. The plan offered partial solutions for many Arabs with teaching credentials who could not find work as teachers and for Hebrew-language schools that experienced a shortage of teachers in key subject areas including math, English, and science. As of August there were 186 Arab educators teaching in Jewish schools. The Ministry of Economy launched an NIS five million (\$1.3 million) pilot program to support social enterprises in employing disadvantaged populations.

Separate school systems within the public and semi-public domains produced a large variance in education quality, with Muslim, Arab, Druze, and Christian students passing the matriculation exam at lower rates than those of their Jewish counterparts. The government noted that the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Education operated programs to provide free matriculation-exam coaching to Arab students. According to the government, the percentage of students in higher education who were Arab (approximately 26 percent) exceeded their share of the population (approximately 20 percent), although according to another statistic from the Council for Higher Education, only 14 percent of university students were Arab. The percentage of master's and doctoral degree students who were Arab was 9 percent and 4.5 percent, respectively, which was significantly lower than the Arab percentage of the country's total population. The government attributed the increase to the opening of higher education institutions in peripheral areas, which made them more accessible to the Arab population. The government operated several scholarship programs specifically targeting the Arab population. Statistics researched by *Haaretz – TheMarker* and the Knesset research center found that Arab students received slightly higher per-capita government support than their non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish peers. Arab and Jewish students who studied in "recognized but not official" schools, to include a majority of Arab Christian students studying in the 47 schools overseen by the Office of Christian Schools, had declines in government funding following a change in Ministry of Education policy in 2013. Two ultra-Orthodox school systems continued to benefit from higher funding percentages than all other school systems.

Approximately 93 percent of land is in the public domain, including approximately 12.5 percent owned by the NGO Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose statutes prohibit sale or lease of land to non-Jews. According to a 2005 attorney general ruling, the government may not discriminate against Arab citizens in marketing and allocating lands it manages, including those of the JNF. As an interim measure, the government agreed to compensate the JNF for any land it leased to an Arab by transferring an equal amount of land from the Israel Lands Administration to the JNF. Legal petitions against the JNF policy of leasing public land only to Jews continued at year's end. The NGO Israel Land Fund continued its program to purchase Arab land throughout the country and market it to Jewish buyers, including in the diaspora. The organization claimed all the land belonged to Jews and described as a "danger" the purchase of Jewish-owned lands by non-Jews.

New construction was illegal in towns that did not have an authorized outline plan for development, which is the legal responsibility of local authorities. Arab communities that still lacked fully

approved planning schemes could turn to their municipal authorities to develop them, according to the government. The government stated that as of August, 131 of 133 Arab localities had approved outline plans for development, 84 of which the National Planning Administration furthered. It stated that outline plans advanced by the Ministry of Interior added an average of 70 percent to existing localities' lands and noted that delays in the approval of plans often related to the lack of vital infrastructure such as sewage systems. NGOs serving the Arab population, however, alleged discrimination in planning and zoning rights, noting regional planning and zoning approval committees did not have Arab representation, and planning for their areas was much slower than that for Jewish municipalities, leading to frustrated citizens building or expanding their homes without legal authorization and risking a government-issued demolition order. The government noted that Government Decision 208 in July includes multiple provisions on the subject of housing problems in Arab localities. On March 4, the director general of the Ministry of Interior told a gathering of planning experts that at times the lack of compliance with government regulations prevented timely government approval. For example, Adalah highlighted the extreme delays faced by residents of the Arab village of Kamanneh in the Galilee; despite approval of a master plan for the village in 2013, the Israel Land Authority (ILA) failed to publish 100 tenders for public housing, contributing to the housing crisis, and preventing development. A "Target Price" housing program of the ILA, designed to reduce the cost of housing by as much as a fifth of the national average price, did not include Arab municipalities. Additionally, some communities discriminated against Arabs. Adalah alleged an association that won a tender to market new apartments in the Oranim neighborhood of Ma'at-Tarshiha refused to sell them to Arabs.

Arab communities in the country generally faced economic difficulties, and the Bedouin segment of the Arab population continued to be the most disadvantaged. More than half of the estimated 200,000 Bedouin population lived in seven government-planned communities. Approximately 30,000 lived in the 11 recognized villages of the Nave Midbar and Al-Qasum Regional Councils, formerly the Abu Basma Regional Council, and approximately 60,000 Bedouins lived in 35 unrecognized tent or shack villages that did not have water and electricity or educational, health, and welfare services. NGOs, Bedouin leaders, and the government noted that Bedouin towns ranked lowest on the country's standardized socioeconomic scale, with most ranking a one out of 10 and only Rahat, Hura, and Segev Shalom ranking two out of 10.

While 11 of 13 recognized villages had plans that defined the areas of the village, in 10 of these villages, all residences remained unconnected to the electricity grid, there was no connection to the sewage disposal system, there were no paved roads, and only six villages had high schools, according to the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality. Additionally, in 10 of the recognized villages, residents were responsible for providing their own water infrastructure to bring water from a central line to their property.

In the 35 unrecognized villages in the Negev claimed by various Bedouin tribes, the government viewed all buildings as illegal and subject to demolition. In cases of demolitions with no agreement from the residents to relocate, the government levied fines against residents to cover expenses incurred in the course of demolitions. Many Bedouin, whose residences or structures authorities subjected to demolition orders, elected to self-demolish to avoid fines.

The government noted its policy in Bedouin areas was to demolish "new vacant illegal structures" built without permits after 2010 and found in areas it determined to be state land, not belonging to

any local authority. The NGO Dukium recorded 1,073 demolitions in 2014, up from 697 in 2013; of this total, Bedouins demolished 718 themselves to avoid fines.

In May, in the latest development in a decade-long legal battle, the Supreme Court ruled that eviction orders issued against residents of the Bedouin unrecognized village Umm al-Hiran was valid and suggested residents be moved to the nearby town of Hurra. The Israeli military regime moved residents of Umm al-Hiran there in 1956. The minority opinion suggested the majority rule "infringes on existing laws." Adalah filed an extraordinary motion for a second hearing before an expanded panel of judges, which remained pending.

The government maintained a program to encourage Bedouins to relocate from unrecognized villages to established towns by providing low-cost land and compensation for demolition of illegal structures for those willing to move to designated permanent locations. Bedouins often refused to participate in this program because they asserted that they owned the land or the government had given them prior permission to settle in their current locations. The NGO Dukium alleged the seven government-established towns were unable to accommodate their own natural growth. Some residents were caught between court-ordered demolitions and the rejection of their designated relocation sites for reasons of overcrowding. Additionally, many Bedouins complained that moving to government-planned towns would require them to surrender claims to land they had occupied for several generations and would separate them from their livelihood. Conversely, the government claimed it was difficult and inefficient to provide services to clusters of buildings throughout the Negev that ignored planning procedures. Some Bedouins continued to pursue legal recognition of their 3,200 claims to parcels of land based on practices of land ownership and sales predating 1948, although in all cases, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the government. For example, in May the Supreme Court rejected an appeal filed by the al-Uqbi family to a lower-court decision rejecting its claim to ownership of the land.

In 2014 the prime minister ordered a reorganization of the governmental authority handling Bedouin affairs, placing the authority within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. In June, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Uri Ariel briefly reintroduced the Praver Plan for redistricting areas containing Bedouin villages in the Knesset but then withdrew it. NGOs and Bedouin leaders noted that the implementation of the government plan for developing the Negev, with the resultant home demolitions and planned relocations of some Bedouin communities, continued apace in the absence of specific legislation to address Bedouin land claims. The civil society group The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality raised concerns that Ariel's policies had exacerbated the gaps between recognized and unrecognized Bedouin villages.

The law bars family reunification when a citizen's spouse is a non-Jewish citizen of Iran, Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon. Citizens may apply for temporary visit permits for Palestinian male spouses age 35 or older or Palestinian female spouses age 25 or older, but they may not receive residency based on their marriage and have no path to citizenship. The government had yet to implement a policy in response to a 2010 Supreme Court recommendation that it provide social services to an estimated 5,000 Palestinian spouses of citizens granted "staying permits" to reside legally in the country.

The government generally prohibited Druze citizens and residents from visiting Syria. The government suspended a program, coordinated with the UN Disengagement Observer Force that enabled Druze residents of the Golan Heights to attend college in Syria and permitted the Druze religious leadership to attend religious meetings in Damascus. The action was the consequence of

escalated military and armed group activity on the Syrian side of the border that prompted the temporary closure of the Israel-Syria access point overseen by the UN Disengagement Observer Force. The government continued to allow noncitizen Druze residents from the Golan Heights to visit holy sites in Syria through the ICRC-managed pilgrimage program, but it had prevented family visitations since 1982. The government facilitated the entry of several hundred Syrian nationals, including Druze, to the country to receive medical treatment.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, based on figures at the end of 2014, an estimated population of 135,500 Ethiopian Jews faced persistent societal discrimination, although officials and citizens quickly and publicly criticized discriminatory acts against them. Following the disappearance of Avera Mengistu, who independently and of his own free will entered Gaza and was believed to have been apprehended by terrorist groups in September 2014, the military initially imposed a gag order on reporting on the case that lasted until July. Family and friends of Mengistu alleged his case received inadequate attention from the government because he was Ethiopian; however, the prime minister subsequently visited the family.

In April, Israeli-Ethiopian citizens protested against what they perceived to be discriminatory treatment in society. The galvanizing event for the protests was the publication of a video from April 26 that showed two police officers in Holon stopping and beating uniformed Ethiopian-Israeli soldier Demas Fekadeh (see section 1.c.). Members of the Ethiopian community emphasized the widespread nature of such discrimination and abuse. Protesters in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv demanded the police officer be arrested and charged; however, as of September 9, such action had not taken place. Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Reuven Rivlin, and many ministers and Knesset members condemned the attack against Fekadeh, praised his call to avoid violence, and promised to work to lessen socioeconomic gaps between sectors of society.

The government maintained several programs to address social, educational, and economic disparities between Ethiopian Israelis and the general population. Those gaps were notable – according to the newspaper *Haaretz – TheMarker*, 52 percent of Ethiopian-Israeli families, including 65 percent of Ethiopian Israeli children, lived below the poverty line, and Ethiopian Israelis registered for welfare at a rate double that of the general population. From 2008-13 the government ran an extended five-year plan "to improve the absorption of Ethiopian Jews," although a 2013 report by the state comptroller said the plan's lack of coordination among government offices inhibited its success. One program operated by the Ministry of Welfare supported Ethiopian integration into the workforce, with education and social support for families and a budget of NIS three million (\$770,000); the ministry's total budget was expected to reach six billion shekels (\$1.5 billion) for the year.

Isolated reports of discrimination by Ashkenazi Jews of European descent against Sephardic (Mizrachi) Jews of Middle Eastern heritage continued. Organizations representing Mizrachi Jews from various Middle Eastern countries claimed that government negligence in pursuing reparations for property losses for Jews from Arab countries and Iran had exacerbated social stratification along ethnic lines since the establishment of the state and during subsequent waves of (sometimes forced) immigration. Legislation dating to 2010 mandates any peace negotiation in which the country engages will preserve the rights to compensation of Jewish refugees from Arab countries and Iran.

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

The law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, and the government generally enforced these laws, although discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity persisted in some parts of society. Oded Frid, executive director of the Aguda, the Israeli national LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex) task force in Tel Aviv, and staff at the Jerusalem Open House for Pride and Tolerance, a leading LGBTI organization, said most of the LGBTI community's gains came through the courts, and not through legislation.

In June the National Labor Court issued a decision confirming that the Equal Employment Opportunities Law should prohibit discrimination based on gender identity.

An LGBTI violence-prevention center and hotline reported it received 250 reports of violence and discrimination between August 2013 and August 2014.

In November the Jerusalem District Court upheld a transgender woman's request, stated in her will, to have her remains cremated following her suicide. Cremation is forbidden according to Jewish law, and the woman's ultra-Orthodox family appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, claiming the woman was mentally unstable when she made the decision.

Transgender individuals who wanted sex-reassignment surgery encountered difficulty securing it. On May 5, *Haaretz* reported that a health maintenance organization refused to pay for two transgender individuals' sex-change surgeries. In March 2014 the Ministry of Health's director general issued a directive stating that sex-reassignment surgery was included in the list of government-subsidized health services provided to all citizens. In spite of this judgment, the patients in question received conflicting information from health-care providers, resulting in significant personal expenses.

On July 30, an ultra-Orthodox Haredi man stabbed six persons at the Jerusalem March for Pride and Tolerance (see section 1.a.). One victim subsequently died from her injuries.

UNHCR expressed continuing concerns for West Bank residents who claimed to be in a life-threatening situation due to their sexual orientation and who requested legal residency status in Israel. There is no mechanism for granting such persons legal status, leaving those who cannot return to the West Bank due to fear of persecution and vulnerability to human traffickers, violence, and exploitation. In 2013 the government established an interministerial team to examine the problem, and the Aguda and the Aid Organization for Refugees, an NGO serving asylum seekers, formed a partnership to work on this problem.

There were reports of discrimination in the workplace against LGBTI persons, despite laws prohibiting such discrimination (see section 7.d.). A study by the LGBTI task force found that employers discriminated against approximately 80 percent of transgender persons, 50 percent of lesbians, and 20 percent of gay men in the hiring process or terminated them once they discovered the employees' sexual orientation or gender identity.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Individuals and militant or terrorist groups attacked civilians, including 13 stabbing or shooting attacks characterized by authorities as terror attacks by Palestinians, Arab citizens of Israel, and Jewish Israelis. For example, on January 21, Palestinian Hamza Matrouk stabbed and injured 12

Israelis on a public bus in central Tel Aviv. Authorities apprehended him, and on July 20, a Tel Aviv court sentenced him to 28 years in prison.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law protects the right of workers to form and join independent unions, strike, earn the minimum wage and overtime, and bargain collectively. The law specifically prohibits antiunion discrimination. A labor court has discretionary authority to order the reinstatement of a worker fired for union activity. The government respected these rights.

Court rulings and union regulations forbid simultaneous membership in more than one trade union. Members of the General Federation of Labor in Israel (Histadrut) who pay affiliation fees may be elected to the union's leadership bodies regardless of ethnicity, religion, or gender.

Authorities generally respected workers' rights to free association and collective bargaining for citizens, although foreign workers often faced difficulties exercising these rights. Worker organizations were independent of the government and political parties.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

While the law prohibits forced or compulsory labor and criminalizes labor exploitation, the government did not effectively enforce laws concerning minimum employment conditions for foreign workers. Labor laws enacted in 2012 increased penalties for forced labor to NIS 35,000 (\$8,970) and helped investigation procedures.

According to government statistics, there were approximately 75,000 legal foreign workers in the country and almost 15,000 illegal foreign workers. Some workers, particularly foreign workers, experienced conditions of forced labor, including the unlawful withholding of passports, restrictions on freedom of movement, limited ability to change or otherwise choose employers, nonpayment of wages, exceedingly long working hours, threats, sexual assault, and physical intimidation. Foreign agricultural workers, construction workers, and nursing care workers – particularly women – were among the most vulnerable to conditions of forced labor, including in particular nonpayment or withholding of wages.

See also the Department of State's [*Trafficking in Persons Report*](#).

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law provides for the protection of children from exploitation in the workplace and prohibits forced or compulsory labor. Children age 14 and older may be employed during official school holidays in light work that does not harm their health. Children age 15 and older who have completed education through grade nine may be employed as apprentices. Regulations restrict working hours for youths between ages 16 and 18 in all sectors.

The government generally enforced these laws and conducted year-round inspections to identify cases of underage employment, with special emphasis on summer and school vacation periods. During 2014 a number of sanctions were imposed against employers for child labor infractions: authorities issued administrative warnings to 402 employers and levied administrative fines on 18 employers, amounting to NIS 1,414,720 (\$362,749). Additionally, authorities filed five criminal indictments and imposed 65 criminal fines on some of these employers. Employers employed youth mainly in the food-catering sector and the entertainment and hospitality sectors.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The Equal Employment Opportunities Law prohibits an employer from discriminating against employees, contractors, or persons seeking employment on grounds of gender, sexual orientation, personal status, age, race, religion, nationality, country of origin, opinion, political affiliation, and army reserve service. Regulations also prohibit discrimination with regard to working conditions, promotion, professional training, dismissal or severance payments, and retirement benefits or payments.

The law charges the Commission for Equal Employment Opportunities with the implementation and civil enforcement of the Equal Employment Opportunities Law. The 26-member commission includes one member each from organizations that promote employment rights for Arab Muslims, Arab Christians, Druze, Circassians, Haredim, immigrants, elderly persons, women, and army veterans. Additionally, the commission must have adequate representation of citizens of Ethiopian descent and persons with disabilities. The government provided no details regarding violations of the law or enforcement activities (see sections 7.b. and 7.e. for treatment of migrant workers).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage is set annually on April 1 to equal 47.5 percent of the average income. The national minimum wage was NIS 25 (\$6.41) per hour and was slightly less for youths under age 18, who earned between 70 and 83 percent of the minimum wage. In 2014 authorities opened 844 investigations against employers for violating the minimum wage law on the basis of 350 complaints. As a result of these investigations, authorities issued 767 administrative warnings and imposed 53 financial penalties, totaling NIS 2,641,300 (\$677,260). The law allows a maximum 43-hour workweek at regular pay and provides for paid annual holidays. Premium pay for overtime is set at 125 percent for the first two hours and 150 percent for any hour thereafter up to a limit of 15 hours of overtime per week. In 2013 the Supreme Court ruled that labor law provisions for overtime pay do not apply to migrant workers who work as live-in caregivers for ill or elderly Israelis. An NGO reported the average salary of an Arab man was 43 percent lower than that of a Jewish man, and the salary of an Arab woman was 21 percent less than that of a Jewish woman. According to the government, the poverty income level for 2014 was a monthly income of less than NIS 3,077 (\$789) for individuals, NIS 4,923 (\$1,262) for couples, and NIS 9,230 (\$2,390) for a family of five, respectively.

The Labor Inspection Service, along with union representatives, enforced labor, health, and safety standards in the workplace, although resource constraints limited enforcement capacity. These standards were generally current and appropriate. By law, workers may remove themselves from situations that endanger their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, and the

government protected this right. There was little information about protection and enforcement standards in the informal economy.

According to some NGOs, the country failed to enforce its labor laws fully with respect to minimum working conditions for foreign workers, and existing penalties were not sufficient to deter violations. Many foreign workers earned significantly less than the minimum wage. There were numerous documented cases of foreign laborers living in harsh conditions and subjected to debt bondage, but authorities prosecuted few employers.

The country had bilateral work agreements with Bulgaria, Moldova, and Romania to regulate recruitment fees of migrant workers in the construction sector, and it had an agreement with Thailand to regulate recruitment fees for migrant workers in the agricultural sector. The entire recruitment process of foreign workers in these industries was coordinated solely through government offices, which resulted in a steep decline in recruitment fees paid by migrant workers in the construction and agricultural sectors.

The agreements provide for migrant workers to have information on their labor rights as well as a translated copy of their labor contract before they arrive in the country. As a result of greater awareness of their legal rights and their reduced recruitment debt, more workers were willing to report labor violations to NGOs or to quit their jobs and return home than prior to the agreements. The government created and helped fund a hotline for migrant workers to report violations. In 2014 the Hotline received 1,372 complaints from agricultural and construction workers. Government enforcement bodies investigated all of these complaints.

Research by NGOs into the living and working conditions of foreign construction and agriculture workers continued to reveal violations of their rights. In 2014 the government issued 36 administrative warnings and one financial penalty totaling NIS 35,070 (\$8,992) against construction-sector employers following complaints by foreign workers of labor violations.

Labor violations by employers in the agricultural sector also remained widespread. A 2014 investigation by HRW of 1,010 separate groups of Thai workers in different farming communities found that in all but one employers housed Thai workers in makeshift and inadequate accommodations, and in all communities employers subjected the workers to illegally low wages and longer work hours than lawfully prescribed. In 2014 the government issued 337 administrative warnings and 36 financial penalties amounting to NIS 2,024,450 (\$519,090) against agricultural-sector employers following complaints by foreign workers of labor violations. The breadth of violations by employers and the lack of penalties imposed by the government suggested enforcement of labor laws in these industries was far from adequate despite the bilateral agreements. HRW attributed the government's failure to enforce its own labor laws for Thai migrant workers to a combination of factors: an unnecessary division of regulatory responsibilities, insufficiently resourced enforcement units, failure to complement a reactive complaints mechanism with a proactive regime of random inspections, and failure to impose material sanctions, which the law provides on employers and manpower agents. The number of labor inspectors was not sufficient to enforce the law effectively.

Some employers in the agricultural sector circumvented the bilateral agreement with Thailand by recruiting students from poor countries to take part in agricultural study programs on student visas and then forcing them to work in the agriculture industry once they arrived in the country.

Employers required participants to pay high fees to participate in what they believed were study programs, but authorities did not supervise their working or living conditions since they lacked work permits and were ostensibly in the country for study. A local NGO estimated there were between 4,000 and 5,500 agricultural workers employed in this manner as of August.

In August the country signed a bilateral agreement with Nepal to regulate recruitment to the home-care sector. Since then, employers recruited 50 Nepalese workers under the agreement, which was the first of its kind in the home-care sector. Abuse in the recruitment of home-care workers remained widespread and included excessive recruitment fees and false descriptions of the terms of employment contracts. Live-in arrangements and lack of legal protections and inspections led to many cases of exploitative working conditions for female migrant workers. Local NGOs filed hundreds of complaints on behalf of foreign caregivers, including allegations of underpayment of wages, physical violence, sexual harassment, and unsuitable employment conditions.