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Many human rights issues in 2017 stemmed from the Israeli Government's violation of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of Israel's military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza (Occupied Palestinian Territories, or OPTs). There were also continued human rights abuses by the Palestinian Authority and by the Hamas administration in Gaza. After a decline in violence in early 2017, there were spikes in hostilities during the second half of the year. This was more noticeable following heightened security measures in July at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and after the US recognition in December of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Incitement has continued to play a negative role, particularly on social media. There were persistent reports of the excessive use of force by the Israeli security forces.

The Hamas authorities in Gaza continued to commit serious human rights abuses. For example, 19 death sentences were issued and six executions carried out. There were also reports that Hamas and other Gaza-based militants were rearming and rebuilding attack tunnels. Approximately 30 rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel in 2017.

Israel continued its systematic policy of settlement expansion, with the advancement of over 10,000 housing units in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), some of which are located east of the separation barrier. On 6 February, the then Minister for the Middle East, Tobias Ellwood, issued a statement condemning the passing in the Knesset of the expropriation law, which provided for retroactive legalisation of outposts built on private Palestinian land. In March, the Israeli government approved the establishment of a new settlement deep in the West Bank, the first such decision for over 25 years, which the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, publicly condemned.

The number of acts of violence and vandalism against Palestinians by extremist settlers in the West Bank rose again in early 2017. This was despite increased law enforcement measures by the Israeli authorities.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian houses and other structures continued in 2017. 403 structures were demolished (including 97 donor-funded structures), leading to the displacement of 653 people, including 360 children. The Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, spoke in the House of Commons on 6 December about the negative effect of demolitions on Palestinian communities. The UK supports Palestinians whose homes face demolition or who face eviction in Area C of the West Bank through funding to legal aid.

We continued to seek improvements in the overall treatment of Palestinians in detention, with a particularly focus on minors (there were approximately 358 minors detained at the end of 2017). Reports of ill-treatment of minors in detention included the use of painful restraints and non-notification of legal rights. Ministers and officials have made repeated representations on this issue and will continue to do so. The Israeli authorities continued to decline offers of expert-to-expert advice from the Metropolitan Police. The UK funded a number of human rights projects on this issue, including providing legal aid to minors and capacity building to local lawyers. Overall, the number of Palestinians held in administrative detention by the Israel authorities decreased, with 437 at the end of the year.

In the OPTs, there was a narrowing of the space for civil society to operate, and increasing restrictions on freedom of expression, particularly resulting from the Palestinian Authority's adoption of a restrictive Cybercrime Law. LGBT rights remained restricted. Same-sex sexual activity is largely taboo in Palestinian society, though legal in the West Bank. Conversely, it is illegal in Gaza, where it carries a 10 year prison sentence.

Palestinian women are among the most educated in the region, but women's labour market participation rates are among the lowest in the world – fewer than 20% of women participate in the labour force.

Israel retained a strong civil society. There was, however, a steady increase in pressure against certain NGOs, particularly those critical of Israel's conduct in its occupation of the Palestinian Territories. This included critical rhetoric and restriction of their activities.

In 2017, Israel's Arab minority constituted about 20% of the population. Some 100,000 Arab Bedouin citizens live in unrecognised villages with limited access to government services and basic infrastructure. Many also face the threat of house demolitions.

In 2018, we will continue to work towards improving human rights by supporting renewed peace negotiations leading to a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel existing alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. We will continue to raise concerns with the Israeli government on instances constituting a breach of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation of the OPTs, including demolitions, settlement construction, and the treatment of children in military detention. We will continue to oppose human rights abuses by the Palestinian Authority and by the Hamas administration in Gaza.