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Palestinian authorities in the West Bank and the Hamas de facto administration in the Gaza Strip repressed dissent, resorting to arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, and use of excessive force against protesters. In Gaza, civilians were tried before military courts. Palestinian armed groups fired indiscriminate rockets into Israel. Vaccine distribution in the West Bank favoured high-ranking officials over health workers. Women enjoyed fewer rights than men in relation to divorce, custody of children and inheritance, and violence against women increased.

Background

Armed conflict between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza erupted from 10 to 21 May, the fifth conflict in 15 years.

Palestinian governing factions remained split territorially – Fatah in charge in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Palestinians in both territories remained under Israeli military occupation and discriminatory rule that constituted apartheid.

On 15 January, President Abbas announced a 2021 schedule for parliamentary elections, presidential elections and elections to the Palestinian National Council, but on 30 April cancelled them all. The last elections were held in 2006. Budget allocations to political parties, governmental departments, security personnel and tenders for natural resource management were corrupt, according to Aman, a Palestinian think tank advocating for transparent governance.

On 10 March, Yahya Sinwar, a former commander of a Palestinian armed group, was re-elected head of Hamas in Gaza. On 1 August, Ismail Haniyeh was re-elected leader of Hamas’s political bureau. Independent monitors did not observe the internal Hamas elections.

In June, the West Bank-based Palestinian authorities replaced elected municipal councils with caretaker committees supervised by the Ministry of Local Government.

Israel’s blockade on Gaza since 2007 forbade the import of materials it deemed a security threat, including spare mechanical parts and chemicals, some of which were brought in through irregular and unsafe tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt perimeter. Tunnels were also used to bypass taxes collected by Hamas on consumables from Egypt. On 18 April, the Egyptian army said it had destroyed five tunnels.

On 30 August and 28 December, President Abbas met the Israeli defense minister as part of confidence-building measures.

In October, Fatah and Hamas representatives participated in talks in Egypt to form a unity government.

Freedom of expression, association and assembly

On 24 June, political critic Nizar Banat died in the custody of Palestinian Preventive Security forces after they arrested and tortured him in Hebron, southern West Bank.¹ This triggered demonstrations for freedom of expression in other Palestinian towns,² which the authorities met with excessive and unnecessary force. Demonstrators and bystanders were arrested and allegedly tortured. According to Addameer, a Palestinian prisoner support organization, Palestinian security forces took at least 15 protesters, journalists and human rights defenders to a detention facility in Jericho city in the West Bank known as “the slaughterhouse” in late June and early July, in the context of the protests. An Addameer lawyer said they were accused of “inciting sectarian and racial strife”.

During demonstrations on 26 and 27 June in Ramallah city in central West Bank, security forces in civilian clothes attacked women protesters, broke equipment and confiscated phones of eight journalists.

On 21 and 22 September, police entered Azhar university campus in Gaza City and beat 15 students at an induction event, according to the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), the Palestinian national human rights institution. The ICHR recorded 129 complaints of arbitrary detention in the West Bank and 80 in Gaza, many related to freedom of expression and association.

Human rights defenders

A presidential decree on 2 March required NGOs to submit their annual plan to the government for approval.

Around 12 people were arrested ahead of a planned peaceful protest on 5 July. Among them was Ubai Aboudi, who worked for Bisan, a Palestinian NGO working for economic and social rights. He was charged with “participating in an illegal gathering”. On 30 November, the Magistrates Court in Ramallah acquitted him and seven other activists of all charges for lack of evidence.

On 4 July, Mohannad Karajah, director of Lawyers for Justice, a Palestinian human rights group, was arrested while working. The Prosecutor-General questioned him on 10 November on charges of “slandering the Palestinian Authority”, “participating in an illegal gathering” and “inciting sectarian strife”. Mohannad Karajah said that he was told that the General Intelligence Service’s complaint against him and Lawyers for Justice related to their media campaign against the illegal detention of political activists.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Widespread use of torture by Palestinian authorities continued. The ICHR received 104 complaints of torture and other ill-treatment against authorities in the West Bank and 104 against authorities in Gaza. On 6 September, prosecutors completed an investigation into the torture and death in custody of Nizar Banat. An autopsy found fractures, bruises and abrasions all over his body. Fourteen low-rank officers of Preventive Security forces in Hebron were put on trial in September.

On 22 May, Tarek Khudairi, a political critic, was arrested at an event in Ramallah. He told Amnesty International that he was slapped on the face, shoved against a wall during interrogation, kept in stress positions and denied medical care for two days.

Right to a fair trial

Presidential decrees on 11 January appointing members of the Transitional High Judicial Council, which replaced the High Judicial Council and dissolved the High Court in in 2019, further undermined the independence of the judiciary.

On 21 October, the Hamas-run Authority for Military Justice in Gaza announced the sentencing of 13 men convicted of drug trafficking. The defendants, all civilians, were tried in military courts without access to legal advice, and some said they were tortured to extract “confessions”, according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. One defendant was sentenced to death, 10 were sentenced to between 10 and 18 years of hard labour, and two were acquitted.

Abuses by armed groups

Between 10 and 21 May, Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip fired thousands of rockets towards Israel, most of which were intercepted by Israel’s “Iron Dome” technology. The firing of indiscriminate rockets is a war crime. Thirteen people in Israel died as a result of rocket attacks, including Khalil Awad and his 16-year-old daughter Nadine on 12 May when a rocket hit their home’s yard in Dahmash near Lod town in central Israel. The rockets also caused at least 20 deaths and 80 injuries in the Gaza Strip, according to Al Mezan, a Palestinian human rights organization. Bara al-Gharabli, aged six, and Mustafa Mohammad Al-Aabed , aged 14, were killed on 10 May in Jabalya city in northern Gaza Strip, according to Defense for Children International-Palestine.

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) discovered a tunnel apparently used by Palestinian armed groups under its Zaitoun schools in Gaza City, which was hit by Israeli missiles on 13 and 15 May.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

On 3 March, ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda initiated an investigation into the situation in Palestine. On 27 May, the UN Human Rights Council established an international commission of inquiry led by Navi Pillay to investigate violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), and in Israel. The Palestinian leadership welcomed the establishment of the commission. Both investigations aimed to cover alleged violations and crimes by the Palestinian authorities and armed groups, as well as those by Israeli authorities (see Israel and the OPT entry).

Enforced disappearances

The fate of six men subjected to enforced disappearance by the Palestinian authorities in the West Bank in 2002 remained unknown, and the authorities took no steps to investigate.

Two Israeli citizens with mental health conditions, Avera Mengistu and Hisham Al-Sayed, remained missing since they entered the Gaza Strip in 2014 and 2015 respectively. Hamas used their detention in negotiations for the release of Palestinians held by Israel. Hamas provided no information on the men’s health or on their ability to communicate with their families in Israel.

Right to health

The health ministry in the West Bank confirmed on 2 March that it had distributed about 1,200 Covid-19 vaccines to high-ranking officials rather than to health workers.

On 14 October, a West Bank-based governmental audit found that welfare payments for people affected by Covid-19 were not distributed fairly and transparently, and that only 5,533 out of 40,000 eligible hardship cases in the Gaza Strip had received payments.

Women’s and girls’ rights

Women continued to have fewer rights than men in relation to divorce, custody of children and inheritance. Relatives attacked women who refused to give up their inheritance or sued for other rights relating to personal status, with inadequate protection from the authorities.

Violence against women increased in the context of Covid-19 measures and the worsening economic crisis. According to the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, 28 women and girls were killed by domestic violence. On 16 June, a woman was killed by a male relative striking her head following a dispute over inheritance in Gaza.

On 8 September, representatives of government, civil society and UN agencies pledged increased support for countering gender-based violence. After women’s shelters were closed during Covid-19 lockdowns, Palestinian hospitals opened safe rooms for women.

Death penalty

The Hamas de facto administration passed death sentences in Gaza. No executions were carried out.

Failure to tackle climate crisis

While olive and grape harvests suffered for consecutive years due to climate change, the Palestinian authorities did not implement proposals for low-resource climate adaptation farming solutions.

Environmental degradation

In the Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank, a third of solid waste went to informal landfills that lacked environmental protections, and only 1% of solid waste was recycled.

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1. [“Palestine: Investigation into death in custody of Palestinian activist must be transparent, effective”, 24 June](#)
 2. [“Palestinian security forces escalate brutal campaign of repression”, 7 July](#)

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