

members. The UK funded projects to reduce stigma, promote community action to prevent sexual violence, and facilitate access to services for survivors. The UN Investigative Team, established following UN Security Council Resolution 2379, was deployed to Iraq to embark on its mandate to hold Daesh accountable by collecting, preserving, and storing evidence of Daesh crimes. This included supporting and complementing investigations carried out by the Iraqi authorities, and exhuming mass graves. The first mass grave exhumation took place on 15 March 2019 in the village of Kojo, the hometown of Nadia Murad. The UK-led Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative is working with partners to develop the Murad Code. Drawing on the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict and in consultation with Nadia Murad's Initiative, the Murad Code will capture international standards and best practice that governments, international agencies and NGOs should adhere to when gathering evidence for judicial purposes.

The use of the death penalty remained a significant concern over the summer, when the then Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi expedited cases of convicted Daesh members, with strong public support. The Iraqi Ministry of Justice announced that 32 executions had taken place between January and August. The UK publicly condemned the use of the death penalty on a number of occasions, and continued to press the Government of Iraq to improve transparency on death penalty cases, and adhere to international standards on due process and fair trials.

In the run up to the national elections in May, the intimidation of female candidates forced some to withdraw their candidacy. The UK and EU jointly and publicly criticised this behaviour. Despite Iraq's Constitution requiring 25% of MPs to be female, women remained sidelined from political decision making. October saw the murder of two high-profile women, Souad al-Ali and Tara Fares, demonstrating the continuing threat of violence against women. The UK regularly highlighted the importance

of gender equality in society and in politics, including by supporting the formation of a women's caucus to strengthen the voice of Iraq's 83 female MPs. We worked closely with the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq to support the development of Iraq's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

Lack of security, access to services and jobs, and marginalisation in general were the principal concerns for Iraq's religious and ethnic minority communities, which in turn accelerated the emigration of members of minority groups. We consistently raised with the Government of Iraq, including the new Foreign Minister, the need to protect vulnerable people, including members of minority groups. By December, we had contributed over £14.4 million to the UN's Funding Facility for Stabilisation to help the Government of Iraq rebuild communities in liberated areas, including the Ninewa Plains, home to many minority groups.

While Iraq's media environment remained relatively free in comparison to the wider Middle East region, serious issues persisted. In April, Human Rights Watch reported arbitrary detentions and violence by Kurdish security forces against protesters and journalists. In July, the Government of Iraq shut down the internet for several days to disrupt the organisation and reporting of protests in southern Iraq. In September, Amnesty International reported that the Iraqi security forces had responded with excessive force and violence to these protests. The UK repeatedly underlined the importance of an effective and impartial media. To support fundamental media freedoms, we funded training for 280 journalists, media specialists, social media activists, and university professors.

In 2019, the UK will both press and support the Government of Iraq to make substantive reforms to be more inclusive, protect vulnerable people, deliver services to all Iraqis, and ensure that the conditions which enabled Daesh do not return. The formation of a new Government of Iraq is an important opportunity to continue Iraq's positive human rights trajectory, but we need to maintain

the pressure. We will continue to press for improvements on human rights, with a particular focus on the women, peace and security agenda, and on freedom of religion or belief. Ensuring the rule of law and fundamental human rights are crucial to Iraq's long-term stabilisation and security.

The State of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

2018 saw continued violations by the Israeli government of international human rights and international humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza (Occupied Palestinian Territories, or OPTs). There were also continued human rights abuses by the Palestinian Authority (PA), and by Hamas, the de facto administration in Gaza.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza was exacerbated by unrest linked to the 'Great March of Return' protests. Palestinian demonstrations along the Israel/Gaza security fence included violence and the launching of incendiary devices into Israeli territory. The Israeli Defence Forces were criticised for using live fire in response. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that 184 Palestinians were killed (180 by live ammunition), including 35 children and medical and humanitarian workers. Over 25,000 Palestinians were injured in demonstrations in Gaza between 30 March and 31 December. The UK supported calls for an independent investigation.

1,153 rockets and mortars were launched indiscriminately from Gaza towards Israel, reaching a peak of 450 on 12 November. The Israeli Air Force responded with strikes against Hamas and militant sites. Sniper fire, rockets, missiles, and explosive devices from Gaza killed 3 and injured 20 in Israel.

Israel continued to impose strict movement and access restrictions in Gaza. The UK funded projects to ease those restrictions and the conditions caused by them.

Israel continued its systematic policy of settlement expansion, a breach of international humanitarian law, and advanced 7,663 housing units in the West Bank, which the UK continued to oppose. The then Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, condemned plans announced in December to construct over 2,800 settlement units.

The number of acts of violence and vandalism against Palestinians by extremist settlers in the West Bank rose, with the OCHA reporting that the monthly averages were the highest recorded since 2014. OCHA reported that 31 Palestinian citizens had been killed in 2018 by Israeli forces and settlers in the West Bank. The Israeli Security Agency reported that nine Israeli citizens, more than double the number in 2017, had been killed by Palestinians from the West Bank, as well as five Israeli soldiers.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian houses and other structures continued: 459 structures were demolished or seized, and 472 Palestinians were displaced, including 216 children. We continued to urge the Israeli government not to demolish the Bedouin village of al-Khan al-Ahmar. Through the funding of legal aid, the UK continued to support Palestinians whose homes faced demolition or who faced eviction in Area C of the West Bank.

We continued to seek improvements in the treatment of Palestinians in Israeli detention, with a particular focus on minors, of whom 203 were detained at the end of December, the lowest monthly figure in two years. At the end of December, the total number of Palestinians held in administrative detention by the Israeli authorities increased to 494 (compared with 425 held at the end of 2017). UK ministers and officials made repeated representations to the Israeli government about detention practices. We continued to fund projects providing legal aid to minors and capacity building to local lawyers.

In October, Human Rights Watch published a report documenting arbitrary arrest and torture in both PA and Hamas custody. We raised our concerns with the Palestinian Prime Minister, who committed to a package

of institutional reforms. We continued to urge the PA to respect human rights, ensure that complaints of mistreatment or arbitrary detention were properly investigated, and continue to improve the security sector's compliance with human rights standards.

In June, PA President Mahmoud Abbas signed instruments of Palestine's accession to seven human rights conventions. However, the PA continued to restrict space for civil society actors in the West Bank, as well as limit freedom of expression. In Gaza, Hamas continued to exercise strict control of civil society.

LGBT rights remained restricted in the OPTs. Same-sex sexual activity, although legal in the West Bank, remained taboo in Palestinian society. It is illegal in Gaza, carrying a ten-year prison sentence.

Hamas issued 13 death sentences in 2018. While the UK maintains a no-contact policy with Hamas, we have made clear publicly, including through EU statements, our objections to its use of the death penalty.

There was limited progress as far as women's rights in the OPTs were concerned. In July, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women welcomed efforts to reduce discrimination, while underlining the need to adopt a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women and to incorporate commitments effectively into law.

Israel remained a robust open democracy with a vibrant civil society. However, pressure continued on those criticising Israel's conduct in the OPTs. This included rhetoric by politicians, pressure on foreign governments to cease funding for certain NGOs, and a reported increase in visa delays and denials for activists. The Israeli parliament passed the Nation State Basic Law in July, which downgraded the status of Arabic language from an official language. We expressed concern that the law might undermine the equality of members of minorities, in particular of Israel's Arab Christian and Muslim community. At the end of 2018, several petitions challenging the legality of the law were pending in the High Court.

In 2019, we will continue to work towards improving human rights, and will support renewed peace negotiations leading to a two-state solution, including through our project work with NGOs. We will continue to raise our concerns with the Israeli government on instances constituting a breach of international human rights or international humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation of the OPTs. We will continue to oppose human rights abuses by the PA and Hamas.

Libya

Human rights abuses in Libya in 2018 included loss of life, limits on freedom of expression, and discrimination against women and girls. Libya's instability and insecurity exacerbated these problems; Libya lacked a stable and unified government or credible institutions, leading to impunity for armed groups and to a divided society. The UK worked to address this situation through a comprehensive approach: we fully supported the UN-led political process to support progress towards greater security and stability, and a range of UK programming aimed to tackle some of the most acute human rights challenges. UK programming also supported efforts to improve human security, including through removal of explosive threats.

Episodic violence contributed to the displacement and death of many civilians. Fighting in September in Tripoli killed over 100 people, including civilians, and indiscriminate shelling affected several neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, the Benghazi-based Libyan National Army's continued campaign to regain control of Derna resulted in civilian deaths.

A lack of basic institutions resulted in limited or no access to basic services. Instances of arbitrary detention, including of migrants, remained a concern. However, in September, the authorities released dozens of prisoners whose incarceration had exceeded the legal period of detention without charge. The death penalty remains part of the Libyan legal framework, although executions have not been carried out for several years. In August,